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# GYPSY IN THE SUN



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*Posita Forbes*

# GYPSY IN THE SUN

*by*  
ROSITA FORBES

*With 55 half-tone illustrations  
and 7 maps in the text*



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TO

*my dear and delightful Aunt*

LILIAN WILLIAMSON

AND

*To all the people who have been kind to me  
in*

*the countries I have liked or loved all  
over the earth*

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. 1920. LOOKING BACKWARDS	9
2. 1920. IN ERITREA AND PALESTINE	16
3. 1920. THE SYRIAN KINGDOM	22
4. 1920. MUCH HAPPENS IN SYRIA	30
5. AUTUMN, 1920. THE SITT KHADIJA STARTS FOR KUFRA	37
6. 1921. ARRIVAL IN KUFRA. RETURN TO EGYPT	48
7. LATE SPRING, 1921. IN THE MIDDLE EAST	53
8. 1921. CAIRO. ENGLAND. ARTHUR. ATTEMPTED PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA	56
9. 1921. MARRIAGE AND MUCH ELSE	65
10. 1922. THE SITT KHADIJA IN WESTERN ARABIA	72
11. 1922. ADVENTURES—SOME IN TRANS-JORDAN	79
12. 1923. FROM ASCOT TO THE ATLAS AND EL RAISULI	89
13. WINTER, 1923/24. FIRST LECTURES IN THE U.S.A.	102
14. 1926. FROM ARABIA—UNEXPECTEDLY—TO ABYSSINIA	109
15. 1926. FURTHER INTO ABYSSINIA	114
16. 'INTERNATIONAL GARDEN-PARTY'	131
17. 1928. WITH THE FOREIGN LEGION	144
18. 1928. A LONDON HOUSE AND FASCIST ITALY IN THE MAKING	150
19. 1928. HUNGARY AND THE REGENT, ADMIRAL HORTHY	155
20. 1928. ROUMANIA AND QUEEN MARIE	164
21. 1928. BULGARIA AND KING BORIS	169
22. 1928. WE LOSE A FORTUNE	174
23. 1928. MACEDONIA AND YUGO-SLAVIA	178
24. 1928. FROM ALBANIA TO GERMANY	185
25. 1929. KING ALEXANDER OF YUGO-SLAVIA AND BENITO MUSSOLINI	190
26. 1929. A PARTY FOR OUR NEW HOUSE. TURKEY, SYRIA AND THE DRUSES	199
27. 1929. HEBREW AND ARAB PALESTINE. KING FEISUL IN IRAQ	207
28. 1929. OIL, ISLAM AND THE SHAH OF PERSIA	214
29. 1929. DESERT AND HOLY CITY—IN PERSIA	220
30. 1929. FROM KURDISTAN TO IRELAND	233

CHAPTER	PAGE
31. 1931. THE LAST OF ROYAL SPAIN. MY LIFE TURNS ROUND. BRAZIL. I MAKE A FRIEND IN URUGUAY	243
32. 1932. MUCH OF ARGENTINA	256
33. 1932. FROM PATAGONIA INTO CHILE. SCOT AND GERMAN	264
34. 1932. BOLIVIAN ADVENTURES	270
35. 1932. AHEAD OF REVOLUTION—INTO PERU	275
36. 1932. MANY THINGS HAPPEN—TO SOUTH AMERICA—AND TO ME	282
37. 1933. FIRST VISION OF RUSSIA	291
38. 1933. THE BRITISH ENGINEERS' TRIAL IN MOSCOW. FINLAND AND FIELD-MARSHAL MANNERHEIM	296
39. 1933. ELEVENTH HOUR IN GERMANY. FIRST VERSION OF HITLER. COMMENT IN LIVERPOOL	304
40. 1933. REMINDER OF KUPFA. NEW DEAL IN WASHINGTON	314
41. 1933. NIGHT OF REPEAL. CHICAGO	323
42. 1933. ADVENTURE WITH THE POLICE. CHICAGO	327
43. 1934. GERMAN WORK IN SOUTH AMERICA. GERMANY'S VERSIONS OF HITLER	335
44. 1934. THE LARGEST PRISON IN THE WORLD. FRENCH GUIANA. THE ADMIRABLE LOUISE	341
45. 1934. ARTHUR, 'JANE', AND BRITISH GUIANA	354
46. VENEZUELA AND THE AMAZING PRESIDENT GOMEZ. COSTA RICA. GUATEMALA. MEXICAN SURPRISES. AFTER FOURTEEN YEARS I COME TO A CONCLUSION. OF MANY ENDS—HERE IS ONE	359
INDEX	374

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ROSITA FORBES	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
IN AFRICAN DESERTS	64
KHADIJA, DAUGHTER OF ABDULLAH FAHMI	65
IF WE COULD GO BACK TO OUR BEGINNINGS	96
ALL DRESSED UP AND SOMEWHERE TO GO	97
THE GREEN BAY TREE OF PUBLICITY	128
ADVENTURE GRAVE AND GAY	129
CLOTHES MAKE THE WOMAN	192
ARTHUR	193
ENDS OF THE EARTH	256
"FOR BETTER" . . . HARDLY AT ALL . . . "FOR WORSE"	257
THE YEAR OF MASQUERADE	288
THE HOUSE THAT INSISTED ON PARTIES	289
MILESTONES	352
THE WORLD'S AS WIDE AS A MAN'S IMAGINATION	353



## LIST OF MAPS

	PAGE
THE LIBYAN DESERT	47
THE RED SEA AND JIZAN	74
ABYSSINIA	113
THE BALKANS	167
PERSIA AND IRAQ	223
SOUTH AMERICA	247
CENTRAL AMERICA	373

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# GYPSY IN THE SUN

## CHAPTER I

1920

### *Looking Backwards*

IF THERE IS ONE THING I LOVE, it is the sun. If there is one thing I hate, it is a storm at sea. Yet, searching for the beginning of me—as an individual, not as the daughter of a brilliant and much troubled father or the wife of a good-looking Highlander with whom for three preposterous years I was miserable—I find it aboard a tramp between Massawa and Suez. The Azich—a gale from the south, habitual as the Trades—had blown for five days. Wind and spray whistled over the sodden decks, as the bows crashed into the trough of the waves and soared up again towards an unsteady moon. The noise was overpowering.

"There can be nothing more to break," I thought, when smaller sounds ceased. I imagined the cabin, inhabited, of course, by cockroaches, littered with the remains of my few brittle possessions. Long ago I had ceased to be afraid of drowning. All I craved was cessation of noise and movement. Night and day had become the same. Whenever I opened my eyes, it was to see the same fury of waters, piled into foaming mountains, purplish at noon, indigo at night. When I pushed myself out of the fleece-lined sleeping-bag at midday wondering whether it were worth the intolerable effort of moving to avoid the direct heat of the sun, the tramp lurched to port or starboard and sent me into the scuppers. At midnight, I burrowed right down under the flaps to avoid the stars which swung giddily on top of me. At intervals, the captain shouted to me from the bridge. Would I not go below? It would be safer there—in spite of the cockroaches. "They'll eat my toe-nails," I replied and the captain, in rapid Italian, explained to me—and to his God—that I was assuredly mad.

After leaving Massawa, I had spent a few hours in the dripping stuffiness below. Cramped in the narrow berth, exactly like a coffin, I imagined myself buried under shovelfuls of heat. I had never felt such heat—not even in Sudanese deserts with the khamsin blowing. When the old cargo-boat, seeking of onions, left the shelter of the African coast, noise and movement were added to stench, sweat and the predatory scuffling of roaches. So I stumbled up on deck.

Somali sailors lashed my camp-bed in the driest place amidships. The most intelligent pointed out that all the smoke from the funnel

poured over that particular spot. "It does not matter," I said, and spoke no more for twenty-four hours. Then I demanded a raw egg. In that early spring of 1920 my Arabic was fairly good. I knew enough to repeat my request twice a day, adding that the egg must not contain the recognizable beginnings of a chicken. At intervals during the nights I asked—with little interest—how soon we should reach Suez. The answer was always the same—"When Allah wills." So, in time, I gave up asking.

Occasionally, a Somali, who was mildly interested in me as in some young helpless animal, suggested that I should wash my face. "It does not matter," I repeated.

After a while, with nothing else to do, I began to wonder what did matter. I had been brought up to such thoughts. For my parents were dominated by their consciences and a profound sense of duty. My father, Herbert Torr, was a Lincolnshire landowner. He came of an old but generally unimportant family established for centuries in or near the Fens. The Domesday Book mentions a Torre having a small acreage in this grim, flat country where my great-uncle William Torr bred his famous shorthorns. Occasionally, the family produced a judge or a politician. In the fifteenth century, one of them tried the murderer of little St. Hugh—buried in Lincoln Cathedral. In the seventeenth, they lost considerable demesnes in the Isle of Axholme because they supported the Stewarts. In the nineteenth, my great-grandfather discovered coal on a Northern property, and his son, passing rich for those days, was Conservative Member for some Cheshire constituency. But on the whole the Torrs were distinguished only for their love of Lincolnshire land. This sentiment, an obsession with my father, shadowed our upbringing. For, in spite of the unselfish generosity of our parents and their consistent good intentions, we four children—two boys and two girls—realized that we were not as important as the plough and woodland, a temple devoted to ancestry worship.

My father was an interesting and able man. He should have had a political career, for he was the best speaker I have ever heard. Looking through old newspaper cuttings, I see that, in 1891, *Punch* caricatured him with his friend, the future Lord Grey, as buds on a Cabinet tree. When he fought and lost—as a Liberal—an election in the Tory stronghold of Horncastle, against Lord Willoughby D'Eresby, the London papers spoke of young Mr. Herbert Torr as a Quixote, who would have to trim his lance to less unwieldy shape before he could make the best use of his talents. He was evidently a clever young man with one great gift—speech. But he suffered from an equally important handicap, for his Puritan conscience—the very antithesis of the Jesuit—would make no concession to expediency and recognize no justification of means towards an end. Consequently, he soon found himself with every talent for politics and no party. With the Liberals, he quarrelled over Disestablishment of the Church. Against Con-

servatism, he was in revolt because of his social ideals. After leaving Cambridge, he had worked in a slum mission and he was inspired by the brotherhood of man . . . in those days and among Tory Lincolnshire squires, a most unpopular complaint.

I think my father was the bravest man I have ever met. He had an acute inferiority complex, because he never found a state of society into which he could comfortably fit. He knew himself always a little out of place—as a premature social reformer among the neighbouring landowners, as a comparatively rich man with the trappings of a country estate among the working intellectuals whom he cultivated. Yet he never departed by a hair's breadth from his principles. I doubt if either he or my enchanting mother ever thought of what they wanted to do. With them, duty was the only thing which mattered. I think it was something of a fixation. For, at times, surely duty may be modified by a sense of humour and shaped by personal inclination.

My mother was the daughter of a keen Conservative, a Scot and a business man. Her Graham and Maclean blood, with all the pride of the Highlands but little of their austerity, was mixed with a strong Spanish strain. Her ancestors came from Toledo and further back from Peru. What a mixture of temperaments she inherited and passed on to us!

We were as inhibited as any of our somewhat unfortunate generation whose grown-up life was the bridge between two wars. Few young people can have had more material sacrifices made for them and have been less well-armed to face the exigencies of modern life. For with ideals too high for ordinary human beings to achieve, we were trained to a sensibility which left us always aware of our shortcomings. Too much was given us. Far too much was asked of us. We could not live up to the haloes which our parents would have had us wear as garden hats. We could not, being of far commoner clay than our people—and bred in a world without security, even for sainthood—appreciate or recognize the haloes. For myself, I found the necessary escape—from too much emotion, from so sensitive an awareness of the next world that the permissible conveniences of this one were often ignored—in planning a career of adventure.

Most writers appear to remember the whole of their childhood. I can recollect little of mine except an extraordinary number of accidents to ponies or on horses, and a sense of desperate frustration; for I was conscious of being 'different' from other people and therefore 'never right'—whether it was a case of too many petticoats under a party frock, or the wrong house in the wrong part of London so that my address amused or amazed fellow schoolgirls inevitably snobbish. My earliest feelings seem to have been composed of admiration for my father's exploits during the only moments when he seemed to me completely happy on indifferent horses just behind hounds, and a desperate, uncomprehending love for my beautiful and thwarted mother, to

whom I longed to give pleasure, realizing that happiness for her was impossible.

All this was too complicated for any child. I wanted joy for my parents and they insisted on a succession of unsuccessful martyrdoms bad for the mind if not for the character. Why should human beings have to give up so much, I thought—furious even as a child. Thus arose a persistent conflict between admiration and disapproval. Eventually, I differentiated sharply between my father's heroism and what I considered his lack of common sense and adaptability. Life for him was too ill-fitting. My own, I decided, should be better tailored.

With this end in view, I read voraciously. There was no limit to what I would learn and know. As soon as possible, I would see for myself. Apart from riding and hunting, I do not think I had many pleasures when I was small—and not so small. For much that my gracious mother would have given—as a bouquet of gay flowers, so pleasing and so unimportant—my father's principles withheld. So my elder brother and I grew up without friends and with no reasonable means of making them. We were midway between everything—in ideas, principles, convictions, politics and social status! In this dangerous situation, I made an inevitable unhappy marriage—with Ronald Forbes, about twelve years older than myself, a soldier without ideas but with an instinct for enjoyment which I ought to have appreciated. I am sure he was a delightful person and I an exasperating one. I cannot think of anyone more unpleasant to be married to than an earnest, temperamental, frustrated and eager girl with everything to learn, longing for love and understanding nothing about its use or misuse.

We went to India—and I wept a good deal, being very miserable and knowing no sensible way of dealing with miseries. We went to Australia and I wept less. For friends began to grow naturally in the unprepared soil of my life which should have been so fecund but had never been suitably cultivated. Men and women were kind to me. More than that, they appeared to find nothing wrong in me. I acquired a little self-confidence—and I mislaid my husband. He eventually fell in love with a charming woman, a little like me but much better-looking. When I divorced him, he married her, had children and was, I hope, happy. For he could be gay without feeling an obligation to be useful. He could be spendthrift without creative purpose. He could do wrong without imagining that he would never again do right. He could give way and laugh at his own weakness, instead of being preposterously dismayed. All this I found puzzling. I must confess that he had also a very bad temper, to which I—no doubt—contributed by being so completely its slave. A temper always gets me down. It is so noisy and I love silence. It is so hideous and I love beauty. It destroys humanity and I was brought up to believe in human divinity.

So was life made difficult for me—from the beginning. For I myself was difficult.

About such things I thought a great deal during that storm on the Red Sea in the spring of 1920. For I was too sick to read. And, by that time, I had done enough travelling to have learned a good deal. My brains—less good than my father's but also less choked by excellent intentions curiously devoid of experience, and hampered by no obligations of the past—were beginning to function. Of pleasure I had had quite a lot in the two years following the Armistice and just before it, when I drove a flying ambulance at the French front for the Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires. For pleasure to me was still closely linked with service. I had to have a purpose in order to be happy.

Having divorced my husband, much against my parents' wishes, for they regarded marriage as indissoluble, I went to Paris—at the time of the Peace Conference, with forty pounds and the intention of earning my living. By then I was in love with an enchanting worldly-wise sailor attached to a diplomatic mission, half English, half Italian, who laughed at me a good deal and with me enough to take the sting out of life. He was very good for me, for he shook me out of many earnest and ill-balanced assumptions. We danced a lot, and ate a lot, and I met all sorts of people.

I remember Clemenceau at a party given by the Roumanian Princess Züztow, now Madame Paul Morand. There he made his prophecy—about his own Treaty of Versailles—"Here is the basis of a just and durable war." We are fighting that war to-day.

I remember crossing the Channel with Lord Balfour who, defeated in practical argument over Palestine, insisted, "Well, the National Home for the Jews is a very poetic idea. As such, it is justified." With us on that journey were Sir Eric Drummond, now Lord Perth, and a French general. I had left my passport in London and appealed to the three men for help. The future Ambassador was kind, disturbed and stern. He would not distort truth by a hair's breadth. Lord Balfour toyed with the idea of saying I was his 'daughter' and gave it up—I thought—with reluctance. The French general had no compunctions. "You will be my wife," he said. "Her portrait is on my passport, but I shall hold my thumb over it." Lord Balfour was amused and delighted. He hovered over our passage through the customs and—safe in the train for Paris—expressed his admiration of French ingenuity. Subsequently he reflected aloud, "The French are a people who never fail a young woman, who rarely—in the long run—fail themselves, and who should be forgiven whenever they fail the incomprehensible English, for they are too bitterly logical to cope with our mixture of sentiment and commercialism. We have too many ideals and they have too much common sense. It is an impossible alliance."

I remember meeting Gabriele d'Annunzio, also I think at Princess Zülow's. He talked to me for some time about himself—until he suddenly realized I was not only the youngest, but the least important person present. "Madame, I must leave you!" he exclaimed. "I owe myself to all the other women."

But most of all I remember, of course, being very happy with the gay young sailor who had neither inhibitions nor complexities and who saw no reason for not saying exactly what he felt—as well as what he thought. He died later that year, in Washington, but by that time I was in North Africa with a remarkable young woman called Armelle Meinertzhagen. She had twice my character. She was golden as a daffodil, and without the ceaseless and generally unreasonable mental apprehensions with which I have made life unnecessarily difficult. We were both devoid of physical fear, which is a condition not a quality, and neither of us acknowledged the meaning of the word 'impossible'. We had already been round the world together and I had written my first book, full of adjectives, about that wholly satisfactory journey without visible means of support. It had given us considerable experience of native life, not only from inside but from underneath. It had taken us off the map in every direction and into the middle of Chinese war-lords. For we tried to go from Canton to Hankow overland by river junk and sedan-chair and ended as the prisoners of the then 'Southern army' with the Northern troops advancing and our interpreter—black and white and plump like one of the best penguins—beheaded as a spy.

In Africa, during the winter of 1919-20, we hoped to repeat such carefree, leisurely wanderings, with little money but much ingenuity and—even on my part—a growing faith in people and circumstances. The latter was justified. Everybody went on—and on—being kind to us. Marshal Lyautey, creator of modern Morocco, looked after us in Fez. I remember being enormously impressed because he talked of 'mon Maroc' just as my father spoke of his Lincolnshire land. When the great Marshal was ill, prayers were said for his recovery in the holiest mosques of Islam. I do not know of any other occasion on which such tribute has been paid to a Christian. That winter we saw the plans—as it were—of to-day's Morocco. For the great roads were building. The Marshal, imperialist, liberal, and devout Catholic, planned on a large scale with an eye to the future. The present was too narrow for him—although in the Atlas, when I asked a Berber what he thought of French colonization, he replied, surprised, "Sayeda, how can I say? For I myself am French." Such was the work of Lyautey.

On we went to Algeria and Tunisia—part of the way in an army truck. For there were still sufficient 'dissidents' among the wilder tribes to make comparatively common the sight of a French body disembowelled and stuffed with straw. We were excited by the atmo-

sphere of armed alertness in the outposts, where we spent uncomfortable nights on military bedding, and reduced to painful indignation by the plight of a girl from Brittany whose innkeeper husband had just been murdered at their kitchen door.

In Algiers we were joined by an Australian who was deeply—and regretfully—in love with one of us, while disapproving of both. Together we went off into the desert south of Biskra and lost ourselves in the dunes between the permanent mirages which we tried to map as lakes. A red-headed Berber guided us to the nearest French post, el Oued I think, where, as usual, the ‘Sahariens’—Camel Corps and White Fathers and incomparable Spahis—were immeasurably patient with us. They fed us and sorted us from the oddments, human and material, we had collected. They set us going in the right direction, with decent camels, a reliable map and a guide, so that in time we duly arrived at Nefsa—goal of Generals Leclerc and Giraud towards the close of the Eighth Army’s advance in 1943.

After that, I remember us all in a long Italian truck bouncing like peas in a frying-pan. The young man, slightly pompous, now an M.P. and very successful, was that day less in love with either of us and not at all with life. For he had chosen to sit on the tailboard, which had no conscience at all about how or where it caught him when he descended from unintentional flights. There was no road. We went straight across the ‘belad’<sup>1</sup>—as fast as the military driver knew how! For at that time the Italians mistrusted both the desert and the ‘jebel’.<sup>1</sup> The tragedy of the Miani column, cut to pieces in the Fezzan, was still fresh in their minds. They were only happy within their barbed wire thickets on the coast. One man they had, whose name I think was Vagliano. The hills were as his own property, locusts his habitual diet, a rifle his twin, and the Berbers his familiar friends. With him, lean, dark, hard and scarred, we saw the troglodyte villages lost in the Jebel, where Italy kept a fort or two as justification for her Tripolitanian venture. From him I heard for the first time of the Senussi, to whom every crime and every tragedy in the Eastern Sahara had long been attributed. Their sacred citadel was Kufra in the middle of the Libyan desert. It was untrodden ground, forbidden to the infidel.

More about this strange ‘tariq’, an austere and heretical branch of Shia Islam, I learned from Francis Rodd, with whom we travelled further into Tripolitania. The great German explorer, Gerhard Rohlfs, had perhaps reached the borders of the Kufra oases in 1870, but he had been captured by the fanatical Senussi, his people killed, his papers destroyed. With his life but nothing else, he escaped.

By cargo-boat, Armored and I travelled along the coast of North Africa, eastwards towards Alexandria. Francis Rodd<sup>2</sup> was a wonder-

<sup>1</sup> ‘Belad’, flat country; ‘jebel’, mountainous or hilly country.

<sup>2</sup> Later Lord Rennell, and serving with A.M.G.O.T.



ful companion. He knew a great deal and had the gift of imparting his information as if it were an adventure shared. He made me want to see the great deserts. As a tale yet to be told, he planned to go with me to Kufra. But to him it was no more than a project—airy and brightly coloured. It might happen, but only if it were put into his hand, fully fashioned with every detail clear. For me, it was the purpose I sought and was the more conscious of seeking with every day in Africa. I would go to Kufra. I made up my mind while the cargo-boat drifted—at times completely out of control, riding lights at the mast—within hand's reach it seemed of the yellow shores. But it was a year and more before I started. I went to many other places first.

## CHAPTER II

1920

### *In Eritrea and Palestine*

IN CAIRO, I met Colonel Kinahan Cornwallis, then head of the Arab bureau, my tutor for many years in all matters concerned with the Arabs. With him I talked of Kufra. With his help the plan took shape. But first, Armorel and I went south to the hot Sudan, preceded by a telegram from Dick Moore of the Sudan bureau, "I am sending you two live wires. Be sure you don't get burned." In Khartoum the 'Undine' of my first book, *Unconducted Wanderers*, lovely and determined, with a clear sense of what she wanted in life and how to get it, left me in order to go on with the agreeable existence of which I was beginning to tire. We had had a lot of fun. With the daffodil Armorel, always *à la hauteur de la situation*, which really cannot be expressed in English, I had learned to be happy without bothering about duties or responsibilities, but I still had a passion for knowledge. Francis Rodd and Colonel Cornwallis had canalized this very strong impetus into a desire to serve the Arabs. With Kufra as my goal and Arabian unity as my interest, but both at the back of my head for the moment, I went to the Sudan. There I met Sir Harold MacMichael, later Governor of Palestine. By him, twenty-three years ago, my course was set. For just so much more force was needed to concentrate all my impulses and my somewhat altruistic ambitions into the solidity of a purpose. Mr. MacMichael, as he was then, taught me Arabic verbs—in their more complicated tenses—told me of the Emir Feisal's struggle for Syrian freedom, spurred me to travel across the Sudanese desert into the then Italian colony of Eritrea, which is geographically Northern Abyssinia, and introduced me to M.I. in Khartoum. By this branch of Intelligence I was invited to do a route

report from Gallabat to Massawa, more or less unknown territory so far as Britain was concerned. I was also instructed to discover if a certain Pan-Islamic secret society, called 'Brothers of the Kaaba', with their H.Q. in Mecca, had spread into Moslem Abyssinia. What more could any girl want! Off I went to Wad Medeni where I stayed with a good-looking, long, dark young man called Patterson, who helped me with the loan of everything he could pretend was unofficial, and was subsequently known as 'the man who refused Rosita Forbes the Camel Corps'.

Astride an enormous trotting beast, bumping up and down on my first native saddle, shaped like a slightly hollow tray with a low spike in front, I started for the Red Sea—several hundred miles away. Between it and me lay deserts, mountains and unbridged rivers. Fortunately I was picked up by Signor Pastori's Fiat expedition—the first motor transport to cross Eritrea from the Sudan to the sea. They built their own bridges and made their own road. Deprived of my camel, I sat on the front seats of lorries which overheated and broke down. I was introduced to fiery drinks and to strange ambitions concerned entirely with machinery. I was quite useful as nurse and cook. I met my first lions—outside the Zoo—camping in a dry river-bed, and shot my first buck for the pot. Meticulously, I charted the route, putting in every stone and—I imagine—herds of game or wallowing hippopotami. After all, the best maps of Abyssinia, made by the Jesuit fathers who travelled between imperial Theodosius in Byzantium and the court of Ethiopia where the line of Solomon ruled a Jewish people black as their mountain rocks—these maps contained such romantic observations as 'here be dragons and great beasts with horns'. Regretfully, I noted no traces of the Khuda-am el Ka-aba, vowed to world revolution on the lines of the first Caliphs. So—after a terrific party, with champagne, at Asmara and a terrifying flight in the company of the same hospitable Italian officials, bumping above the tops of mountains, with a worse bump down to the coast—I came to Massawa. Stupefied by foaming sweet wines and by the quick drop from tableland to seashore, hot, damp, deaf, I was thrust at midnight after yet another party, or perhaps it was the end of the same one, on to a tramp with a cargo of onions. Straight into the Azieb gales, which blow through brilliant sun and heat, we rolled. And—when I was not too sick—I began to think . . . about Kufra and the past. Fear of drowning probably added to the intensity of my thought. For even the Captain acknowledged that we were—on occasions—very near it. How that boat moved! The Arab 'dance of the stomach' was stillness itself to the gyrations she achieved. There were moments when I hoped she would go down. Then at least it would be quiet. But though she wallowed right under the waves, so that—lashed in my flea-bag—I was drenched and half choked—she came up again, shaking herself with the pleased surprise of a terrier who finds he cannot drown. I

have no idea how many days and nights I spent—battered, damp and sick—with my past going round and round in my aching head, and nothing but raw eggs in my stomach.

Then, for no reason at all, on a night no better and no worse than the many which preceded it—for by this time the engine had broken down and we were pitching north at the speed of the breakers—I came to life. "I want," I said, using the rough Egyptian 'auz', "I want bread, fruit, ginger-beer, a comb." What a lot of things I wanted and how tiring it was to want anything at all! The Somali took one horrified look at my face, as I burrowed out of my salt-caked bedding, brushing back a mess of hair. It was probably the first time he had seen all of it, clearly. Without a word he extracted a fragment of mirror from his torn trousers and handed it to me. Aghast, I realized to what a human countenance could be reduced. "Water, hot," I added to the list of my requirements.

Next morning, before I opened my eyes, I realized that the light was steadier. Cautiously, I blinked—and saw, between swollen lids, a strip of blue sea rolling riotously to the cliffs of Sinai peninsula. Immediately I tried to get up, and upset myself with flea-bag and camp-bed into the familiar scuppers. The Somali picked me out of them. "Last night I saw land," he said, "but the noble lady would not wake. In two hours, three hours or perhaps—if Allah wills—to-morrow—Suez!"

So—for the second time—I came to Egypt. I remember a rainbow sprang from the tombs of the Mamelukes as the train passed. I thought it would bring me good fortune and was prepared to be very happy in Cairo. I am not sure if I knew then that I was balanced precariously between my first intelligent passion for a man and a sentiment much more confused. This last was, I imagine, an inevitable heritage from my father, who sacrificed himself as a matter of course for persons or nations he considered ill-used. I had been accustomed from my childhood to exaggerate the importance of lost causes, lame dogs and misfits. At no time that I can remember was my admirable father, whom I admired and by whom I was generally exasperated—except when he was on a horse—without a justifiable and perfectly reasonable purpose which he treated as a crusade. But his reasons were not those which appealed to fellow landowners in the most conservative county of Lincolnshire. Therefore I had grown accustomed to being 'different'. Constantly I had been told 'it is different for you', because—owing to my father's political convictions, approaching in those days to socialism, and to his strong religious principles—we were brought up to regard life, which our neighbours just enjoyed, as a serious obligation. So I was always ready to devote myself to somebody or something—indeed, I think, to whatever insured a maximum of effort and discomfort.

At that time, the Arabs were suffering from their first surprise and

dismay at Britain's inability to fulfil the pledges which had brought them into the last war. Under the Emir Feisul, son of the Sherif Hussein, subsequently King of the Hedjaz, they had fought on the flank of Lord Allenby's armies. Organized by Colonel Lawrence, they had raided and blown up bridges, destroyed roads and rails, acted, indeed, as the famous guerillas and partisans of the present war. In return, they supposed they would receive their complete independence throughout Arabia. Lord Curzon had promised 'while the sun rises and sets, the Arab flag shall fly over the four cities of Hama, Homs, Damascus and Aleppo'. Simultaneously, Lord Balfour had promised Palestine as a National Home for the Jews. France had added to the potter by demanding a mandate over Syria, which, of course, contained the four cities mentioned by Lord Curzon.

By the time I arrived in Cairo—inspired by the just requirements of the Arabs, befriended by the men who knew most about them—the Emir Feisul had been crowned King in Damascus. Britain was paying him a monthly subsidy. France had refused to recognize him. She maintained a representative, Colonel Cousse, in the capital and—with a battalion in Beyrout—established a vague hold on the Lebanon whose Christian merchants took their culture and their clothes from Paris, their cooking, music, habits and jewelled water-pipes from Stamboul.

The Zionist leader, Dr. Weizmann, had already arrived in Jerusalem with the constitution of the Republic he believed himself entitled to create. There were then, according to generally accepted figures, ninety-three Moslems for every seven Hebrews within the too-much promised land.

Controversy was certain. But I had an added incentive to meddle. For at Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo, a curious young man, afterwards briefly celebrated for an amazing cross-China journey by car, Duncan McCallum, came to me with a request that—without official standing of any kind—I should report to General Newman, then commanding in Cairo, what was happening—under the surface—in Syria. "Tell us what the King is doing and how he gets on with the tribal Sheikhs, with the Druses and the Christians of the Lebanon. Put in anything you hear about the French—what the Arabs think of them and how far they would go in their objection to a mandate. Just your impressions. That is all we want."

The idea was not attractive. I had letters of introduction to the one-armed General Gouraud, France's High Commissioner in the Lebanon—a doubtful and difficult position. For in that narrow coastal strip four thousand years of troubled history have contributed to the confusion of twenty different races and as many religions, dissident to-day as in the time of Phoenician Jezebel. I hesitated and protested, but Captain McCallum insisted. "Your own country comes first, doesn't it? At this moment Syria is the key to the Middle East.

The interests of our Moslem empire may be affected." After a good deal of argument I agreed. For I was impressionable and serious as my father when he devoted himself to exiled Greeks and persecuted Armenians, or threw up a promising political career because official Liberalism threatened the security of the Church.

Off I went—to Palestine first, at the time of the Easter riots. The road to Jerusalem winds up between grey hills which grow steeper and more barren as the plain of Esdraclon is lost to sight. A shepherd, invisible in a gully, whistles a plaintive melody. A company of donkeys, dripping oranges from gay saddle-bags, are driven up from Jaffa. The peasants with them wear bright reds and blues. Across the bleak hills, washed in clear lilac shadows, an Arab in brown woollen robe with a coarse head-dress—the 'kufiya'—muffling his face, leads his sheep, dark and lean, across the stones and the sparse grass which knew, perhaps, the feet of Christ. Nothing has changed upon these hills.

But on the road we passed khaki detachments marching up from Ludd where, in the birthplace of St. George, their camps were pitched. "The riots must still be in progress," said General Lambert, who was driving. "They won't stop me at the gate, but I don't know what you're supposed to be doing."

A careless Jew had mocked a Moslem pilgrimage to the tomb of Moses. The pilgrims, armed with stones, turned on the man who insulted *their* prophet. Passing Jews, carrying more serious weapons, tried to protect their countryman. As the Easter hymns were sung in the churches, a messenger, breathless, brought news of a battle raging round the Jaffa gate. British soldiers dropped their prayer-books for bayonets and marched to the rescue.

"I believe there were about a score killed and two hundred wounded," said the General. I had known him since I was seventeen. We had once been engaged for a hectic week which dismayed us both. "Of course next day there was the usual looting," he continued. "Everybody seized whatever they could lay hands on. One of our men got his fingers bitten to the bone trying to separate two women fighting over a sewing-machine which belonged to neither!"

It was late in the afternoon when we reached the Jaffa gate, where Sikhs conducted a thorough search of persons and baggage equally vociferous. For the bales of livestock protested even more than the peasants with arms hidden in flowing sleeves or under vastly embroidered waistcoats. Everywhere there was movement, alert, unusual, unexpected. Ambulances were involved with strings of camels. Soldiers in tin hats were putting up temporary telephones. Cavalry clattered over the cobbles. Staff cars rushed about their business.

General Lambert's spectacular good looks were as useful as his shoulder badges. We passed through the guarded gates and into the old city, where machine-guns were posted under the Stations of the

Cross. Shutters were barred, but every race and class jostled against the barrier of imperturbable Sikhs. Old Jews with parchment faces, lined as if with centuries of thought, crouched on doorsteps, their ancient garments indistinguishable in the dusk. Their kinsmen from Poland wore greasy ringlets under fur-trimmed caps, and coats of purple or amber velvet. Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Latins shouldered Ethiopians in white shawls, and sombre orthodox priests. Nomads, with long curved knives under their mantles of camels' or goats' hair, looked as if they still moved in the pages of Isaiah. Bedouin women, wearing necklaces of coins, argued over the sale of oranges. Veiled Moslems pushed slowly between Kurds in tight pale trousers. Caucasian nuns in curious square head-dresses contrasted with tribesmen whose scarlet leather boots were laced with royal blue. It was a wonderful crowd. "There are Moslems here from the Euphrates to Abyssinia. It is our holy city—like Mecca and Medina," said an Arab who had attached himself to us. He pointed to the ruins of a house. "One of our women was shot by a Jew as she leaned over her balcony to look at the fight in the street. So her relations came and burned down a Hebrew house. Four of the family perished."

"What is the use of it all?" I asked.

"None," said the youth, who was killed some years later in another riot, equally ineffective but not from either point of view purposeless, for two great races, Jew and Arab, believe they have sole rights in a land sacred for centuries to Christian, Moslem and Israelite. "It is all politics," he added. "There used to be no difference between Jew and Arab. Under the Turks we did not trouble which was which. But if the Zionists get hold of our country, what will be left to us?"

For two thousand years of history, from the days of Judean Herod who married the daughter of the Nabataean Arab King Aretas to those of 'Allah Nebi' (Allenby), the British conqueror with his Arab allies entering Jerusalem by the 'golden gates', there had been racial peace in Palestine. But by 1920, the word Zionist was taken—most foolishly—to mean enemy as well as foreigner.

It was Friday when I reached Jerusalem. So, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, divided into chapels for the different sects of Christendom, so puzzling to the natives we try to convert, there was a blaze of light. Swinging lamps showed the mass of women in black veils kneeling in the main nave, the property of the Greek Orthodox. Two priests were saying Mass. The Patriarch, an imposing figure in vestments of black and silver brocade, stood in a high gold niche, under a golden canopy. In the Armenian chancel, the High Priest was washing the feet of pilgrims. His crimson silk contrasted sharply with the grass-green cloaks of his assistants. It was all very bewildering, for so many rival services were going on at the same time. "It is always thus," said our Arab friend, "and if the Armenian carpet chances to touch the Greek tiles, there is a fight. In the Church of the Nativity

at Bethlehem, there used to be a Turkish sentinel to keep peace between your many creeds." He spoke with the scorn of the 'true believer' for whom 'There is no God but Allah and Mohamed is his Prophet'.

The one perfect thing in Jerusalem is the Mosque of Omar, once the temple of Solomon. Blue is it or green, or iridescent with gleams of gold and grey? I saw it first in the evening, when it was very quiet. The dome rises superbly above wide marble courts. Cyclamen, scarlet in the uncut grass, listen to the olive branches whispering above them. Cypresses challenge the towers flung skywards from the mellow walls which separate the garden of enchantment from the town. Across grey, cool spaces beyond the battlements and the long-closed Golden Gate, there is a glimpse of the Mount of Olives dimmed by the trees which comforted Christ's sorrow. "Here came the Prophet Mohamed in a dream. He rode his winged horse from Mecca and you can see the hoof-prints on the stone. It is said also that the angel Gabriel left the marks of his fingers on this rock when he held it, while the Prophet ascended to heaven." This information was offered by an old Arab, his worn robes knit into the twilight so that we were only conscious of his face, keen-edged as a hawk's but the colour of old parchment.

At the Wailing Wall we could hear the Jews mourning the fall of Jerusalem. In the Governor's office I listened to able Zionists—nationalists and politicians—arguing about the number of emigrants Palestine could support. In those days they would come from Central Europe, Russia and Poland. They would be revolutionary in sentiment, knowing more of town life than of farming. Some of them would be keen Communists, others idealists with a passion to restore the ancient 'Eretz Israel'. From far-off Afghanistan fur-traders might come. From Spain and the red Hamada desert in North Africa, old men who had thirsted for Palestine would come—at last—to the promised land. The sons of well-to-do scientists and merchants—college graduates—would travel from the capitals of Europe to establish communal farms in Esdraelon. For them the University would take the place of the synagogue, Karl Marx of the Talmud—and Lenin rank beside Moses.

This is how I saw the problem in the spring of 1920.

### CHAPTER III

1920

#### *The Syrian Kingdom*

FROM JUDEA—the little land which created our history and which today is a crucible of faith and war, of politics and good intentions and

such mistakes as were inevitable after the conflicting promises of my Lords Curzon and Balfour—I went to Damascus. I travelled from 4 a.m. till nearly midnight with a Syrian captain called Asmi Bey. He asked me what I thought of Palestine and said, "Soon, if Allah wills, it will all be one country under the rule of King Feisul."

"You cannot fight France for Syria," I protested.

"England would not allow her to attack us," said the soldier who had fought with the Emir<sup>1</sup> and Colonel Lawrence and believed that—with their victory—his people would win independence.

"We were your allies and this is our country," continued Asmi Bey. "Why should it be taken from us? France should keep the Lebanon, so that she can still talk of the Crusades and supply the silk interests in Lyons. But ours is a national cause, not a religious one. When the Emir Feisul was crowned King, the Greek Patriarch and the Moslem Prime Minister joined to support him. Christians and Moslems work together in his cabinet."

Looking back over twenty years, it is permissible to wonder whether the Sherifian house of Mecca could have united Arabia. This was the dream of Colonel Lawrence. It was the life-work of such realists as Sir Gilbert Clayton and Gertrude Bell. But a greater power, ignored in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, had not only risen but established itself in Riadh. The rebel, St. John Philby, whose mighty work *The Heart of Arabia* should live as history when Colonel Lawrence's elegant literature is forgotten, foretold the Wahabi power and gave up his British official position to join Ibn Saoud. To-day, there is only one man who can play a great part in Arabia—as Feisul might perhaps have done a quarter of a century ago, had Britain proved faithful to the spirit and letter of her pledges. This is the Wahabi leader, the Emir of Nejd, to whom America extended the help and facilities of the Lease-Lend bill.

I remember arriving at the hotel in Damascus in the middle of the night and finding the dusty, plush-covered divans in the hall still crowded with smokers. Their outlines overflowed. Their postures expressed the utmost negligence. In fat and boneless ease, they appeared to be plastered over the upholstery. The proprietress, amiable and amazed, led me into an enormous apartment with three large double beds. "Could I have a single room? I am alone."

The huge Levantine looked bewildered. "This is a single room."

"Why three beds then?"

"One of them is a sofa," she explained, indicating the carpet over a mattress.

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter!" I said.

Early next morning I was wakened by a Greek. He brought me black coffee, brown bread and olives, and told me that a member of the National Assembly, Ahmed Bey Tahiaty, was waiting to see me. I

<sup>1</sup> The Emir Feisul, afterwards King, first of Syria and then of Iraq.



remember him as a tall, good-looking man with a slight cast in one eye. His appearance was carefully arranged, even to a gold-knobbed cane. From him I learned about the Syria of those frantic months when the seed was sown that was to bear bitter fruit in the riots and rebellions of subsequent years, culminating in strenuous opposition to the British occupation of 1940.

Ahmed Bey refused to share my enthusiasm for the unspoiled Damascan 'suqs' as crowded with colourful life as a Shah Abbas prayer carpet with rich design. "When the young moderns come into power, we shall do away with all this," he said, including in the sweep of his cane a shopman holding one end of a rug, some veiled women in orange and black like plump wasps fingering the other, and Kurdish girls, tightly bodiced in rose-pink, who paused to offer advice while a white-shawled Druse, holding her veil in her teeth, strained her one visible eye to see as many defects as possible. "We shall enforce European dress and build new streets with public baths." The idea of much forcible washing amused me, but I was aghast at the suggestion that the Street called Straight might be pulled down to make way for jerry-built emporiums. "Don't you see the beauty of all this?" I asked.

The dim soaring arches had sheltered St. Paul. They might have heard King Herod plotting the death of Cleopatra on her way to join Pompey near the Euphrates. "For me, there is no beauty—only dirt," said Ahmed Bey. "We are discussing now in Parliament how to give women the Vote, and that is the first step towards abolishing the veil. We must have equality. That is the next step—after security."

How little difference there is between the talk of 1920 and that of 1943, between the young polyglot Moslems educated at Robert College, in Constantinople—who wanted to make a neat, new world out of all the ages and the passions heaped together in the markets of Damascus—and the young English socialists at war to-day with dictatorship, at war also with the beauty as well as the refuse of tradition. But Ahmed Bey and his fellows knew more of the world than our contemporaries who plan policies at variance with fundamental human characteristics. While the tall, elegant Syrian spoke of the country he would like to create, independent and self-supporting, allied to Britain, a cry rang down the arcaded street. It was so sharp that it broke into the cadence of camel bells, and the soft shuffling of hooves and sandals in the dust. We peered round the corner and saw a veiled woman running from a Sherifian policeman. He caught her none too gently and slashed at her 'habbara' with a pair of scissors. "It is an order of the Pasha, ya Sitt," he explained, laughing.

Ahmed Bey frowned. "It is absurd. The Prime Minister, Hashim Pasha, is very old-fashioned and he disapproves of the short 'habbaras' and transparent veils the younger women want to wear. So he ordered the police to cut any sleeves or skirts insufficiently voluminous—as a

<sup>1</sup> Cloak.

warning, you know!" So feudalism and socialism in the Syria of 1920 mingled destruction with construction, but were agreed on regimentation. Out of such confusion bureaucracy has been born. It thrives all over the world to-day.

Hashim Pasha was an interesting man, but he had a hopeless task. His appointment had been approved by England, but that month the promised subsidy was delayed. The new King had nothing but his own private purse with which to pay the bills of his new Government. The Prime Minister's kindly hazel eyes peered from a network of wrinkles. They were tired, and the florid outlines of what had once been the simple, good-natured face of a soldier were sagging. "The future is in the hands of Allah," he said, "but what is your own proverb 'No bricks without straw'." England withholds the help on which we counted. We cannot even pay our police, and the French bribe the brigands in the Salhiyeh hills to make trouble in the town. His Majesty supports the schools out of his own pocket. We are trying to run a Government without a revenue and—just across the Lebanon—General Gouraud's army waits to take advantage of our first mistake." It was a heart-breaking situation to watch. For the Arabs were so much in earnest and they trusted to their ally, Britain.

One day I lunched with Emir Zeid, the King's youngest brother, in his house outside the town. There I met King Feisul for the first time. It was the beginning of a friendship which lasted for thirteen years.

"I do not want to waste the sound of an English voice," said Syria's elected ruler. "But I cannot yet speak your tongue. In it, I know only the names of my friends. Tell me about them." Eagerly, he asked about the men with whom he had fought in the long desert campaign. "None of them write to me now, but I cannot believe they have deserted me."

The lunch table was strewn with the heads of marigolds, but they were the only gay thing about that party. For every face was strained. The Minister for Foreign Affairs looked at me with the questing eyes of a Latin. "I am an old boulevardier, Madame," he explained. "After half a lifetime in Paris, I am out of place here."

Feisul brought a more serious note into the conversation. He was dismayed by the Zionist policy, for he saw Syria and Palestine as one land—an Arab land. "If the country is divided, there can be no prosperity," he said. His words were prophetic, in that lasting prosperity cannot be founded on dissident interests. But Jewish immigration—as I was to see in later years—modernized and developed Hebrew Palestine. Tel el Aviv became a mixture of Central European traditions and provincial American habits.

Evening after evening I used to drive out to dine with King Feisul in his house outside the city. In the cafés, international spies pooled their information. In a discreet white building with many ways of entry and exit, Colonel Cousse, representing France, listened and

observed. Once he said to me, "Madame, il paraît que vous êtes du dernier bien avec Sa Majesté. La France saurait bien être reconnaissante si vous voudriez nous remettre ce que le roi vous dit——"

"No," I said. To the same request, made by a surprising number of people, including an envoy of Jerusalem's young Mufti, now in Germany, I said the same "No." And I went on dining—among heaped marigolds—with the Emir who had been crowned King. The scent of apricots blew in from the famous gardens. The seven rivers of Damascus purred between the fruit trees. The snows of Hermon lay still against the silken skies. It was hopelessly romantic.

The Emir used to walk up and down talking about the desert. "I am a Bedouin by blood and I am stifled by walls of masonry and clouds of intrigue. Even my friends are beginning to mistrust me, for I counsel patience, which they call weakness. If we fight France for this, our own country, the European newspapers will insert a small paragraph at the bottom of a column, concerning 'disturbances in Syria'. When they mention a 'satisfactory solution', it will mean that a people who might one day be a nation will have been crushed. On the other hand, if we accept a French mandate whose elasticity will be stretched to cover military occupation, we shall be called cowards whose words were out of proportion to their deeds."

We used to talk so long that Tachsin Kadri, who has now been Chamberlain to three generations of kings in Iraq, generally fell asleep on a bench. I used to call him 'the perfect A.D.C.' Years later, in London, when he was a K.C.M.G., we used to talk of our wild, heart-felt hopes for Syria when we were all very young and ready to sacrifice everything—except the faith of the Arabs and the honour of Britain.

The same situation is in the making to-day. For townsmen and tribesmen—from the black tents of the nomads, pasturing their herds between Moab and the borders of Iraq or Nejd, to the offices and the high schools of Damascus—reclaim the firebrand of 'national independence'. This time Ibn Saoud, Lord of the Puritan Wahabis, whose authority is based on religion rather than territory, and whose character has never been assailed, may—if he so chooses—be the deciding factor.

Into the middle of my talks with the Emir, when they stretched towards the small hours, crept a small crumpled figure in grey and gold silks. "This is my nurse. She is always asking me to rest," said the tall, slender, dark young Arab, bearded and delicate like most of the Sherifian family. "She was with my mother when I was born, so she thinks she has a right to interrupt my work. Sometimes she cries over me and pets me, and generally she interferes with State business because she thinks I ought to go to bed."

"Do you obey her?" I asked.

"Not often. It is such waste of time to sleep, when there is so much work to be done. Besides, I do not like rooms. I can only sleep well

when I see a three-cornered splash of light through the opening of a tent."

At that time the fragile old nurse was the only woman in the palace, for the Emir had sworn that he would not see his wife and son again till Arab independence was assured. That oath he kept. His family did not rejoin him until he was King of Iraq.

From Damascus, I went by car with Ahmed Bey Tabiati and an American driver lent by the Emir, to Palmyra, capital of the great Zenobia who defended her Arab kingdom against Roman Pompey. I stayed with the old Sheikh, who had once been to Paris and had brought back a number of clocks and mirrors with which he decorated the harem. I slept on an enormous bed with several of his wives. The oldest was white-haired and shrivelled like an ape. The youngest was a child with apple cheeks and surprisingly blue eyes.

Ahmed Bey was worried about leaving me in their charge. "Have you everything you want?" he asked, fussing like a kindly hen.

"No, nothing," I said. For my suitcase had been lost.

The American driver bent down and with some difficulty extracted a comb from his boot. "I don't know if this is much good, but please take it," he said. "I always carry it with me—and a tooth-brush in the other boot. They come in useful."

Early next morning we started off across trackless country, half grass, half desert, with the Syrian hills dwindling in the west. We were bound for a camp of the Ruwalla tribe whose Sheikh, Nouri Sha-alan, I had met in Damascus. In the dusk we saw their goats spread over sunburned pasture. "The Ruwalla are rich. They have thousands of camels," said Ahmed Bey. As a concession to the desert, he wore an abbaya over his immaculate lilac tweeds, and had substituted the Bedouin 'kufiya' for the townsman's fez.

Our visit was expected, and our approach signalled by an invisible watchman. Suddenly a band of horsemen galloped towards us. When it seemed they would be on top of us, the leaders reined their horses back on to their haunches with such force that showers of stones spurted from their hoofs. It was as if a wave had been frozen just before it broke.

The horsemen accompanied us to the Sheikh's tent. There we sat on striped rugs and drank coffee, while an old Bedouin, who might have been Abraham, talked to us in slow, guttural Arabic. He was very dignified. Hurry was a word unknown to him. Women he treated with great kindness as if they were children. As a toy, he gave me a delicious black kid. "It is for your dinner," explained Ahmed Bey. But I would not hear of such sacrifice. Claspings the indignant kid, who wriggled like a centipede, I begged for its life. The old Sheikh, amused and fatherly, told me that like all his possessions, it was mine to do with as I chose. "The first duty of a host is to fulfil the wishes of his guest."

Relaxed and leisurely, speaking only after long pauses, the three of us sat at the opening of the tent, while night came down. The flaps of the great 'beit es sha-ar' (house of hair) had been turned back. We could see the gradually darkening sky and the glow of camp-fires. Shadowy figures moved against a background of desert. There was confused sound from the flocks driven in—like a dark tide—towards the tents. Riding-camels were hobbled beside the 'houses of hair' belonging to their owners. A tinkle of silver bracelets showed where a woman brought water from the goatskins the men had filled. It was, I think, the first night I had spent in a desert camp, and it went so deep into my heart that for more than twenty years I have remembered the smells and the sounds of it, and above all the ache, half sweet, half bitter, with which from that moment Arab life set its seal on me. Whenever I am lonely and 'thronged' with the pressure of people and circumstances, I think of such nights. I see starlight so clear that the black tents seem to be outlined in silver, and camp-fires flickering among the shadows. There is tremendous space—desert or plain. I see torches blazing round the open canvas under which sit tribesmen in their worn brown abbayas. They are drinking mouthfuls of bitter coffee and—unless they be Puritan Wahabi or Senussi, forswearing all pleasures of the flesh save women—smoking their long-stemmed water-pipes.

That particular night, on the borders of Azraq, which is 'no-man's-land' between Syria, Nejd and Iraq, I watched a procession of Nubian slaves, more richly dressed than their lords, with curved daggers in their belts, bring sheets of bread, thin as packing-paper, and a sheep roasted whole, stuffed with small birds, rice, eggs and spices. Like the rest of the company, I ate with my fingers. I washed them in a brass bowl, probably from Birmingham, with a cake of cheap, violently pink soap. A slave poured water out of a long-beaked ewer. Another swung a censer out of which poured a cloud of aromatic perfume. Then Ahmed Bey began to speak of what was happening in Damascus, and from the peaked tents, where the fires were burning low, the tribesmen came, muffled between head-dress and cloak so that I could only see their eyes. They made a great, dark crescent on either side of the Sheikh. For a while they were motionless. I thought of them as sentinels of Bedouin Arabia, isolated by their manner of life, intolerant of change and suspicious of strangers.

I had difficulty in following the sophisticated Syrian eloquence, but gradually it caught and held the desert men. Like a cornfield under the wind, the crowd quickened and came to life. They were stirred by the deeds of Feisul, with whom many of them had fought. I watched them catch fire. Ahmed Bey's voice beat the tune of their own pulses. He was himself affected by the sympathy he had aroused, by the sorrows of his race, and by the unquenchable hopes of the idealist. Interrupted by muttering of applause, he took no notice.

Sometimes a shout emphasized a particular point, but I doubt if he heard it. Drugged by the inspiration of his own words, he spoke of freedom and unity and of an Arab empire, which under Feisul, descendant of the Prophet Mohamed, should recapture the position held centuries ago and lost since the last Moorish King Boabdil surrendered to the Cross held by Ferdinand of Arragon. He appealed to the Bedouins by the names of their famous ancestors and prophesied equal honour for their sons. He urged them to forget their tribal feuds and to combine for the good of Islam and Arabia. "United we are a fortress, inviolate against the greed and the politics of Europe," he cried, and pleaded for the maintenance between the great tribes which rule the desert of—"the peace of Feisul."

To-day that peace is in the hands of the man the King—first of Syria, then of Iraq—most admired, Ibn Saoud of Nejd. To-day men of the desert and men of the towns look to Britain, as they will never look to France, for they do not trust either her politics or her people. Once again there is a chance to unite the peoples of Arabia in a logical federation such as Turkish rule established from one end of the peninsula to the other.

"A prophet and a messenger has come among us!" shouted the young warriors of Ruwalla, twenty-three years ago. Surging forward, a dark tumult, brown as the desert, they caught the polyglot young cosmopolitan in their ranks—the symbol of civilization submerged in primitive humanity. "Mabruk, mabruk," sounded on every side. "Blessed are you who bring such news! Allah is great and He has inspired your words."

Rifles were fired. Drums began to beat. The women—in sombre reds—crept out of the tents to listen. My eyelids were stinging. My heart beat as if it would break out of my body. I saw the eyes of young boys grow hard and keen, and old men's faces lose the set lines which life had graved on them. "The peace of Feisul," they cried. "Peace in the land of the Arabs."

Arrogance, suspicion and narrow egotism had been washed out of every expression. With a timeless simplicity, the tribesmen vowed themselves to a purpose. They had—for the moment—found their leader. And I had found what is always necessary for the happiness of the Torr family. I had found an unpopular cause for which—without reason or profit—I could make sacrifice.

## CHAPTER IV

1920

### *Much Happens in Syria*

ON THE WAY BACK to Damascus we had trouble. It was in a Christian village, between Tadmur and Baalbek. Dusk found us still struggling—in rain—over the red loam in which our wheels spun helpless. I suggested spending the night in one of the mud houses, with sagging clay roofs supported on beams. Ahmed Bey looked thoughtful. "We are near the western zone where they do not like Europeans. If they think you are French they will kill you," he said. Cross and tired, I was bewildered by the different aspects of coastal Syria, where Metouelis, Maronites, Nestorians, Assyrians, the devil-worshipping Yezidis, the Chaldaeans whose spiritual home is still Babylon, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics, strange cults who worship water, the colour blue, or a fish with Jonah for their prophet, were completely muddled between their faiths—political or religious—and their personal ambitions. "We must sleep somewhere," I said, "and I'm so bumped and wet and dirty I really don't mind being killed."

The driver grinned. "I guess Americans don't die as easily as all that," he said, and I admired enormously his cheerfulness and calm. If you get into a really serious difficulty, Americans cannot be beat. "But alas I am not an American," I regretted.

"Well, I don't know as I ever heard of a woman dying *before* an American either," reflected the driver, and added, "in a personal case, I mean."

Ahmed Bey was suddenly practical. "Anyway, you'd better put on a 'kufiya'," he ordered. "Then you won't be so noticeable." With humour, he added, "If there are going to be any deaths, they might as well be for a good reason, not just for a mistaken idea of 'foreigners'." With the utmost good humour, the driver submitted to being wrapped in the long napkin-like head-dress of the Arab, the end of which he wound over his mouth, so that only his rather serious, very honest blue eyes distinguished him from his fellows.

As soon as we entered the village, a sullen crowd pressed round us. Ahmed Bey spoke to them, but they would not listen. Stones were thrown. Resentful voices expressed the common hatred of strangers. "You are Christians," harangued Ahmed Bey, who could always be counted upon for a full dress speech, "and would you be less hospitable to us than the Moslems who shared bed and food with us last night? You are the first people to betray the law of the 'belad' . . . and we are friends of Feisul."

A murmur of distrust swelled. The unveiled women pressed closer. "We would welcome you who are from the Sherif," shouted a man, "but the girl is French."

"She is not," yelled Ahmed Bey, and to me, "Say you can't even speak the language."

"I won't," I retorted with the ill-timed obstinacy which must have justified a good many persecutions.

More stones hurtled past us. A few found their mark. It was impossible to move without going over the crowd. Unperturbed, the American drew his revolver. "If they want a scrap, I guess this will do in a few," he said.

At that moment, a caravan of Metoueli camels turned into the street, completely blocking it, for there were over a hundred of them, laden with tents, bales, cooking-pots, water-skins and carpets. Donkeys crowded after them. Some of these were ridden by women, with children, kids, lambs and fowls in their arms. There were a number of horsemen too, well armed with modern rifles.

With such a diversion, the villagers showed signs of forgetting their disagreeable intentions. But the nomad Metouelis had come from the Lebanon, where European occupation was unpopular except among the cultivated merchants of the towns and the oppressed Christian minorities, enfeebled by centuries without arms or leaders. The horsemen pressed round us, scattering the villagers. "If the girl is from Beyrout we will take her prisoner——"

Ahmed burst into new speech, attributing to Feisul the Emir and to Nouri Sha-alan, paramount Sheikh of the Ruwalla, kinsmen of the great Aneiza federation, virtues and powers I thought more suited to Allah.

"There's no need to worry," muttered the American. "I'll get a hustle on—soon as these horses have kicked enough folk out of the way."

He was as good as his word. For when the bulk of the camels had passed and the Metoueli riders were showing their prowess by damaging as many villagers as possible, his foot went down on the accelerator. The car shot forward, heaping the eloquent Ahmed upon the baggage, but scarcely disturbing his speech. Shots were fired. Yells followed us. But, before the horsemen had made up their minds to give chase, we were out of the narrow, crowded streets. "Wallahi! What people!" exclaimed Ahmed Bey, straightening his 'kufiya'. For the next hour he talked—like a Nazi, or a Fascist, or a Bolshevik, like any enthusiast of a new creed founded on force—about what must be done to rescue the people from what they wanted and to give them—by violence—what they did not even know they needed.

I thought to what troubled heritage the French insisted on being heirs—with their little tinkling song 'Partons pour la Syrie' and their ingrained terror of British imperialism. How little anything has



changed in twenty-three years. Syria is no good to France. It is—on the contrary—a great expense. It is a constant thorn in the flesh, although the French, with the surprising assurance of Charlemagne and of the Crusaders, with the complicated culture of hair-splitting intellectuals—do not mind being unpopular. It is the simple and despairing Germans who hate being disliked and so—on the whole—hurt themselves as much as they do the rest of the world. For their self-persecution—by means of regimentation—is just as intolerable as their passion for ordering the world to their own detestable pattern.

Turkey could rule Syria. So could Britain. The former would probably be more popular. I doubt if Syria could rule herself. She is too mixed of blood and purpose. Nejd could extend her austere authority over the desert tribes and America or Sweden, or indeed any completely unconcerned country, keep a watchful eye on the plots and counter-plots of the Lebanon. The only country which—even with the best intentions—can not make a success of Syria is France. For she expects too much. And she has nothing to give. In a generation or two, when she has re-created herself on some pattern yet to be evolved, she may be sufficiently free of politics, prejudices and pretences to guide another people out of a similar fog. But Syria needs direct and persistent simplicity with an example such as—in happier days—Marshal Lyautey gave to Morocco, the great Kemal to his new Turkey, and Cecil Rhodes to the land of his own name.

Of such things I thought as I drove back to Damascus—by way of Beyrout, where I saw Duncan McCallum and reported my opinions and a reasonable proportion of what I had seen and heard.

In the capital the curtain was rising for the third act. The play culminated, a few weeks later, in the French march on Damascus, the slaughter of Arab patriots and the exile of the Emir.

The day on which Syria learned that Versailles had decided in favour of a French mandate remains clearly in my mind. Damascus was chaotic. The whole city howled for war. The news had spread to the desert—without telephone or telegram. From every direction, tribesmen rode in to consult with the Emir. The hotel was crowded with hard, lean men in 'abbayas', some with roses behind their ears. They had all brought their rifles. Daggers and pistols crowded their belts. All morning the streets had been thronged and the houses empty. Rumours swelled—the French in Beyrout had been reinforced. A battalion, a regiment was marching on the new capital, which is one of the most ancient capitals in history. For it has known the warrior Caliphate of Omar, the puppet kingdom of Herod and—long before Judah rose and fell—the merchant princes of the old spice road across Arabia, the Nabataean Arabs who built the great dam in Mareb and when it burst watched flood change the geography as well as the history of the whole peninsula.

My lunch was interrupted by Hashim Pasha. The Prime Minister

looked ill and worn. "I came at this time so that we should not be disturbed," he said. "You are English, so I want to tell you how persistently we Syrians—who think—have worked for your country. We could have borne a British mandate if you would have made it short and, when you had schooled us, left us to our own coming of age. The Americans we would have welcomed, for they put things right and then they go—as in the Philippines and Cuba. But France is a mistress who wants to be a wife! She will never leave and she will have a hand in everything. She is as a woman, weak, crying one moment and clawing the next. She can do nothing for us, nor we for her. Why should we be sacrificed?" His gaze wandered vaguely. He had lived long in Paris. He loved the French genius for living, but Syria needed blunt truth, not intrigue and artifice. "I am too old for politics. I have done my best, but with this betrayal, I am defeated." He looked heavy and dull, so pathetic in his hopelessness that I touched his arm. "The King and you have done everything to prevent war——" I began.

"There will be war to-morrow," said Hashim Pasha, "unless a miracle happens."

"No!" I protested. "That would be disaster!"

The Prime Minister looked at me with a gleam of his old force. "You do believe that, honestly? So do I, but the young men want to fight France. Indeed the whole country wants to fight! How can I, alone, hold out?"

"You have many supporters," I said, "among the older and wiser men."

"Gradually, they are leaving me. Even Ahmed Bey Tahiaty is wavering. He will make a speech this evening and nobody knows whether it will be for peace or war."

"Impossible!" I said. "I'll see him. I'll stop him——"

Hashim Pasha looked at me very kindly. "You do believe in us, don't you? You believe we ought to have a chance. That is all we ask. Let us see if we can govern ourselves. Well, you may be able to do some good, for you have much influence here. But it will only be temporary. When you leave, the extremists will forget your words."

An hour later Ahmed Bey dashed into my room. "Hashim has resigned," he cried. "He made a great speech declaring his distrust and dismay, but begging for patience to see what France intends. But the whole Assembly was unanimous—for war. We must sweep the French out of Beyrout, while they have only small forces there. When more of their troops come, it will be too late. Then all we shall be able to do is to die."

I argued. Cool, common sense—comparison between the trained strength of France and that of Syria, always divided against herself—was the last thing Ahmed wanted. "What are you?" he cried.

"Why do you always preach peace? They were asking about you in the Assembly to-day, and some said you were a spy in the pay of France."

Some years later a book was published in Paris called *Les dessous de l'espionnage anglais* in which I was provided with all sorts of exploits and talents. My supposed services on behalf of 'perfidious Albion' were rated very high. This publication may have given rise to an extraordinary paragraph in *Les Notices*, attributing to me 'the sex appeal of the British secret service', which in 1934 gave me an unpleasant half-hour in Moscow.

With truth I told Ahmed, "It does not matter what they say. People who look like me are never spies. I am much too noticeable to be anything but a traveller."

Many years later, at Deir-ez-Zor, after Italy had seized Abyssinia, I lunched on board the British cruiser which took the Emperor and his family to safety. In the privacy of his cabin, the captain asked me, "What job are you really on?"

"None," I said, casual and uninterested.

"Oh, I know you have to say that. Of course, you are right. But I've been on the inside of things here, myself, so I'd like to know."

It was very hot and damp and I had had a journey of many months through East Africa, but I roused myself to say, "Really—it *is* the truth. I *am* just travelling. Probably I'll write a book." And I repeated, that secret service agents are not of my kind, although I do think talking a lot, with an appearance of enormous indiscretion, is far better cover for a secret than the hushed mystery of diplomatists who, while denying information, acknowledge its existence."

The captain refused to be convinced. "You can't fool me," he said, determined—and contented—to fool himself.

So the legend grew. It began, I think, in Syria, when Ahmed leaned, white-faced, across a rickety table and accused me of being in the pay of France.

"Nonsense," I said. "You know in your heart I am right. If you speak for war to-day, you will betray your country."

As far as I remember, the argument went on all day, but with different people. And next morning—how and why I cannot now recollect—I found myself in the House of Assembly, with a wild intention forming.

"The people have heard about you. They want to see you," said Ahmed, and thrust me—before I was fully aware of his purpose—into the rostrum.

It was, I suppose, proof of Arab goodwill towards England that nobody objected. I looked down upon rows of serious faces. The 'young party' were in European clothes with fezes, the old-fashioned Moslems and Bedouins in national dress. Diffidently, I began a little speech of gratitude and sympathy. Questions volleyed from the back

of the hall: "If France declares war on us, will England stop her occupying Damascus?"

"No," I said. "For years England and France have fought together. They will not quarrel now. It is impossible."

Then—without thought and in the end without fear—I made the speech which, repeated and exaggerated, gave me for awhile some standing in the Arab world then struggling for independence from Baghdad to Cairo. Why the old Sheikhs listened I do not know. It may have been because I was British. My accent was that of the men with whom they had fought—and with whom, after adventurous raids, they had sat round their camp-fires and shared coarse tales, laughter and bitter coffee. There was silence and stillness during my speech. It must often have been halting because of my inadequate Arabic. "You should make friends with France," I said. "There is only one future for Syria now—it lies in peace. Work with France instead of against her."

I wonder if I was right! Had the Arabs risen and fought, they might for the moment have saved their country from occupation. War might have united them—but this I doubt. They might have proved to a dismayed Europe—as did the Turks under Kemal—that they were a nation with a national pride and purpose. I wonder—would France, tired after her heroic four years against the Germans, have troubled to put a big force into Syria? To keep the country from Britain, yes, for that she would have ventured much, for she has always been frightened of what she imagines our Mediterranean designs. Indeed, when we realize the extent of her entirely logical distrust we shall have gone a long way to solving our mutual difficulties. We are sentimentalists, for all our commerciality, and La Belle France is at heart the small farmer, hard, shrewd, thrifty and suspicious.

In 1920 she might have agreed to face-saving terms, contenting herself with the Lebanon, if she had met, in those early days when she had only a battalion in Beyrout, with effective and united opposition. But nobody dared risk such advice.

"There must be no war," I said. The Assembly muttered, doubted, shook old heads and young ones, then began to nod. Approval changed to conviction. A roar followed me into the street. I had won.

Ahmed Bey ran after me. "You must not go. They all want to talk to you. You have made a wonderful effect. They believe again in England. You must come back."

So the purpose I had formed was put into words. During the next ten years, I went back—again and again. All I wrote and the speeches I made, on both sides of the Atlantic, were with the hope of interpreting the Arabs to the Anglo-Saxon races. As I travelled further and further across the map—and over the generally-accepted edges—I tried also to present a fair portrait of Britain to peoples who often liked us as individuals. But they doubted our official intentions and were dis-

mayed by the complexities in which by reason of our changing policies or our passion for compromise we became involved. Simultaneously, I laboured most earnestly over a book which Harold Nicolson once described as "dull, pompous, boring, tedious" and "*painfully* accurate". It has long been forgotten. The critics did not read it. They were not, at the moment, interested in the conflict between industrialization and mediaevalism, Zionist and Arab, Islam and Bolshevism, France and the Syrians, democracy and dictatorship all over the Middle East. Gaily they wrote of adventures I had never had, sunsets I had never seen—so contributing to my disillusionment! For in those days I was bent on dealing out facts as if they were a pack of cards. Influenced by the small group of men and women who lived largely among the Arabs—and wholly for them—I strove to put their case before an England which was gradually ceasing to exist. To Disraeli's conception of British responsibility I could have appealed, but the needs of commerce, dependent on finance and raw material, were predominant after the last war. Therefore, in my work I signally failed. So did many wiser than I.

At last, it dawned on me that I had started with three serious mistakes. The most important was irrevocable. I had most foolishly been born a woman. I was young. In those days, I suppose, I was good-looking. In America, in Russia, in modern Europe, these things would not have mattered. But in England the triple handicap was too heavy. To be useful, women, it seems to me, must, with rare exceptions, be in uniform, or in overalls—metaphorically, if not actually. Nadejda Stancioff, Bulgarian diplomat and stormy petrel of the Balkans, Lloyd George's interpreter at Geneva, 'international kid' to Lord Bryce, could not have been English. Nor could the incomparable Alexandra David Niel, the French bourgeoisie who spent fourteen years exploring Thibet, or the superb women of the Russian evolution, or indeed Halideh Hanoum Edib, playing Joan of Arc to Kemal's liberating armies. As part of the 'public'—that amorphous mass which exists only for British official speakers—we are cherished and approved. As individuals, informed and combative, the most we can achieve is a pigeon-hole—in or out of Parliament.

Twice I have been offered the chance of standing for that remarkable assembly, but Westminster is not for me. I am a gypsy. I must have the sun.

## CHAPTER V

*Autumn, 1920*

### *The Sitt Khadija Starts for Kufra*

I WENT TO KUFRA. The journey was a preposterous adventure. It occupied the winter of 1920-21, but it was not so wearing as the months of preparation, during which I fought every combination of circumstance. Briefly, what I wanted to do was to cross some six hundred miles of desert ruled by the fanatical Senussi and jealously guarded by the Italians established on the Tripolitanian coast—in order to reach a group of oases whose exact position was unknown. It would be necessary to evade or escape the Italians before reaching the desert. I should have to travel as an Arab woman, by camel, over waterless country, rarely crossed even by Senussi caravans.

Looked at seriously, and measured by common sense, it was an impossible undertaking. But in Cairo, Colonel Cornwallis had introduced to me a certain clerk in the Ministry of the Interior who had been on a mission to the Senussi and met their titular Emir, Sayed Mohamed, then restless and dissatisfied under the Italian wing. This civil servant was by no means bound to his desk and his files. He had imagination and courage. His name was Ahmed Bey Hassanein, and he is at present chamberlain to the King of Egypt. So his career has been on a pattern with the *Thousand and One Nights*. For he was made a K.C.M.G. when he accompanied his sovereign on an official visit to England.

When I first met him he was shy, sensitive, gifted with speech and enthusiasm, bitter and generous, brave, foolish and an extraordinarily good companion. He was easily depressed and always conscious of his Eastern blood, which made him cleverer in vision but less factual than his Oxford contemporaries. He saw much clearer than we did and was therefore amazed at the way we blundered into success. He could serve a person easier than an abstract idea. His father was a learned and respected Sheikh of the Azhar university, which position, apart from its religious significance, may be the approximate counterpart of a don. Hassanein Bey had heard of Kufra and wanted to go there, but he had done nothing practical towards the translation of ambition into achievement.

With excitement, he agreed to accompany me, but all arrangements were left in my charge. They were complicated. For I had very little money, no knowledge of surveying, inadequate experience of desert travel and insufficient Arabic. All this had to be remedied. For six months I divided my time between plane-table surveying and learning

the Egyptian language with a charming, pathetic little Syrian, very gentle and diffident who looked like a half-drowned mouse. He supported a vast and straggling family in his own country. So he never had enough to eat in ours.

Slowly—for I am an atrocious mathematician—I mastered the elemental attributes of sextant and theodolite, of chronometer, altimeter and boiling point. With equal difficulty I acquired sufficient Arabic to pass—with the addition of a Circassian mother, slave in the harem of the Bey of Tunis—as a native woman. I had also to study the Koran and the ritual of Islam in which it would be supposed I had been reared. I had to learn to eat, sleep, dress, sit down and get up, walk and behave under all circumstances as an Arab woman. I had to be sure that, praying five times a day, in the sight of fanatics, I should make no mistake and that—if I had a nightmare—I should scream in Arabic not in English.

In my mind, I had to transform myself into Khadija, daughter of an Egyptian merchant, Abdullah Fahmi. I had to imagine myself recently widowed and making a pilgrimage to 'holy Kufra'.

While I was collecting maps and information from the Royal Geographical Society, doubtful in those days of Gerhard Rohlfs' accuracy, and inclined to think he had not reached Kufra or correctly reported its position, Hassanein Bey arrived in England. By this time he had had time to think what would happen to him if—taking French leave from the Ministry—he failed to return with the laurels of Libyan discovery. "I shall lose my job," he said. It was evident that he would prefer to lose anything else. I took him to Lincolnshire to stay with my people, and there—in an atmosphere of traditional security—the whole family set itself to reassure the young Egyptian.

His doubts, of course, were justified. It was gallant and generous of him to risk his future for an adventure in geography. I remember long walks in the great oak woods spreading beside the heavy Lincolnshire plough. In my enthusiasm I guaranteed Hassanein Bey's salary out of my own small income, already strained to provide our equipment. My sister and my parents took the good-looking, brilliantly intelligent young Moslem into damp thickets of rhododendron, or round and round the kitchen garden, and in well-chosen words confided to him their anxiety and their trust. By the end of that visit Hassanein Bey had no chance. He was definitely committed—by the faith of a charming and singularly persuasive family—to 'looking after Sita'.

When we were all certain that we had sufficiently reassured the young man—whom we liked and who saw through us with ease, but was without sufficient force to escape what he must have begun to accept as 'maktub'—'written' and therefore inevitable—I went to Italy. The Emir Feisul, deprived by France and his own conscience of the Syrian throne, was in exile on Lake Como. As a Sherif of Mecca,

his word carried weight throughout the world of Islam. His father, King Hussein, then ruled the Hedjaz and was guardian of the holy cities. From Feisul, I wanted a letter to Sayed Mohamed of the Senussi.

The world of to-day was not yet in the making, for Fascism was still a spiritual rather than a material force. Young Italians despaired of their country's political and social inertia. They were appalled by its disorganization and the banditry rife in offices and trains, in the streets at midday and on the docks at night. So they gathered behind the strongest man they knew—Benito Mussolini. In those days the Duce was a socialist in the original sense of the word and editor of *Il Popolo* in Milan.

It happened that I arrived in this city during some of the first Communist riots. The red flag had been raised over sand-bags heaped into walls. There was considerable disorder. The station was isolated. No trains could leave it.

With the destructive impatience which has always been my greatest fault, I appealed to a stranger on the platform. I must go on. I must get my luggage out of the sealed van now being detached from the train.

The stranger was a short, square-shouldered, full-necked man with a curiously lidless stare. He told me his name and it meant nothing to me. He found an axe, and with the help of two or three lads who followed him as if he were the Baptist, broke open the wagon and produced my luggage. For awhile nothing more could be done, so he took me into the barren café of the old station, with its atmosphere of stained wood, slops and cheap tobacco, and gave me what he called 'tea'. I did not recognize the drink. He asked me what I was doing and listened with apparent interest to my tale. That has always been one of Mussolini's qualities. He can listen. Often he does not believe what he hears, for he is addicted to his own ideas. But he does ask intelligent questions and he gives the impression that he wants exact answers.

After awhile he said something like, "You can pay me now for my help. Give me a story for my paper. It is the age of women. Our d'Annunzio started it with the altar he raised to Eleanora Duse." I thought that the self-satisfied Gabriele in his *Il Fuoco* had established himself as an idol in front of the woman he loved and betrayed. But it was no moment for intellectual discussion. I told Benito Mussolini—in rash confidence—of the journey I planned and made him promise not to write about it until I was well on the way.

He laughed. "That will be never. Some man will make love to you and so it will end." Women, he explained, were so much more pleasant when they were in love.

I agreed with him, but suggested it was a temporary condition and could not therefore be the mainspring of life. I had already been in



love two or three times. "It is a very agreeable state of mind," I said, "but it is not of the first importance."

The Italian mocked me. "It is a pity you are not a man," he said, "for those are a man's thoughts."

At that moment I must have been wholly British, for I remember feeling Philistinian as well as surprised. What nonsense these Latins talk, I thought, and how soft they are! "A lover would be a most awful nuisance on serious travels," I said.

He laughed. "When you are—in truth—a woman, you will think differently," he said.

With Ella Maillart—who crossed Turkestan alone and China with Peter Fleming—I once discussed the same problem. We agreed that a man added to the difficulties of a journey because he needed so much more than a woman.

Mussolini, seeing me into a late train and doubtful where it was going, said to me, "Remember—a satisfactory personal relationship is all that a woman needs. The Sahara will not take the place of a man. You are too serious about 'your' desert!"

The Emir Feisul received me at Cernobbio on Lake Como. On a balcony under the hills, we talked about Arab independence. It seemed to me then a mirage, but the Sherif was still sure he could make it real—and useful. He did not approve of the Peace Treaties. Like the astute General Smuts, he knew they were compounded of bitterness, ignorance and exhaustion. They could not last. In the words of the wise South African soldier and statesman the Arab Emir said, "Peace is still to be made."

Feisul was already suffering from overwork and worry. He did not like the lake. "Water has no expression," he explained. "It is inhuman as an artillery barrage, whereas the desert, even if it is an enemy, fights you face to face."

The Emir gave me a long letter to Sayed Mohamed Idris es Senussi. When I presented it some weeks later, this ascetic leader of a people already doomed told me, "Feisul was born to help the Arabs—that is his destiny."

At last, in early October, 1920, after six months of preparation, Hassanein Bey and I started for North Africa. Lord Rennell<sup>1</sup>—once our Ambassador in Rome—had given me an introduction to the Italian Governor of Cyrenaica. In it, he wrote the most flattering things of my wit, intelligence and appearance, so—from hospitable and curious Latins always interested in 'woman'—we were assured of a welcome. But it took us a long time to reach Bengazi. For every minor disaster happened to us. In pre-Fascist days, Italian trains must have been about the worst in the world. It was quite common for the conductor and the guard to appear, armed, in the first-class carriages and demand the passengers' valuables. If anything was lost, it was never recovered.

<sup>1</sup> The first Lord Rennell.

If anything was broken, it was never mended. So, when our particular express derailed, we were not surprised. No effort and no eloquence could secure the release of our all-important baggage from the vans, which were shunted from siding to siding and eventually lost in 'il paese'.

After several despairing days in pursuit, Hassanein Bey and I arrived in Rome. We had nothing but what we carried. From station to Ministry I went, reaching at last the Secretary of State for the Interior. For—as the Red Queen—I strode so fast from square to square on the chessboard of political economy that I dragged with me and after me a whole procession of official 'Alices' too breathless to protest.

As far as I remember the whole Ministry was finally involved in the search for our lost equipment. After a long time and at enormous public expense—with several *tête-à-tête* meals thrown in—everything was recovered. Hassanein Bey and I would not again be parted from our possessions, so to Naples we travelled *in* the van, sitting *on* our camp-beds and tents.

In Syracuse, we were again delayed because various things happened to the old-fashioned boat. It almost came to pieces in the hand, but it was put together again, much to the gloom of my Egyptian friend, who was a worse sailor even than I am. Very sick, very miserable, very undistinguished and feeling, no doubt, both futile and absurd, we wallowed across the Mediterranean. Smoke and smell were equally thick. Crumpled and unwashed, we arrived at Bengazi, where the Italian Governor, Senatore de Martino, immediately invited me to stay.

Hassanein Bey, saying he was my 'secretary', put up in the town, which left him free to make contact with Sayed Mohamed Idris, Prince of the Senussi. I met this eminent Arab at a dinner which a rich merchant called Omâr Pasha gave in his honour. Immediately, he spoke to me as if we shared a secret. . . . "May Allah give you your wish."

I told him how I loved the desert and how, like the Emir Feisul, I was happiest when, from a narrow camp-bed, I could look at a triangle of starlit sky between the flaps of my tent. "I too," said Sayed Idris, "cannot stay more than a month in one place. Then I must move—for I love the scent of the desert."

It is true, there *is* a scent in the Sahara, although there may be no tree or blade of grass for a hundred miles. It is the smell of the untrodden earth.

I have often been asked, "Why did the Senussi Emir let you go to Kufra? What did he and his brother, Sayed Riddha, hope to gain? They were endangering their prestige among their own people, by allowing an infidel and a foreigner into their sacred land."

To this day I do not know the exact answer to that question. Sayed Idris was certainly affected by Hassanein Bey's eloquence and per-

sistence. The Arab always takes an intensely personal view of incidents and events. To-day in Iraq, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, the British Ambassador who was welcomed with the cry, "Sidi, why did you not come sooner?" can do more than an entire division because he was King Feisul's closest friend and trusted beyond measure as adviser to the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad. To-day, in Syria, Colonel Stirling—'Michael' to us—is almost sufficient to counterbalance the Gallic passion for intrigue because he has long been established in Arab hearts. His wisdom, experience and justice are the best weapons we have against rumour fertilized by French fears and suspicions. So in Cyrenaica, the Senussi princes paid tribute to Britain in my person. This, I think, is the explanation of the help and support they accorded us. They liked Hassanein Bey, but they admired and believed in Britain. They wanted us to secure them from Italy. If a British alliance was impossible, they hoped for an Egyptian one.

With the Emir Feisul's letter, I became a person of importance in the eyes of Sayed Idris. Hassanein Bey had been with the British mission, so his position was already established. Together we were regarded, perhaps, as a move in the political game. And that fact goes far to justify French apprehensions in the Mediterranean, although it does not make them reasonable. For it cannot be doubted that—unduly influenced by satisfactory personal contacts—the Arab states or tribal confederations outside French colonial Africa would prefer British suzerainty to any other. They would like no more than the shadow of it, for they have learned to differentiate between the individual and the policy he represents. But even this must be extremely trying to nations with their own frontiers on the Mediterranean.

Sayed Idris, with unexpected sense of humour, helped us to escape from the Italians. It was a game—and also a battle. I do not know how far the Governor guessed our intentions. If he realized we meant to go to Kufra, he should never have let us out of Bengazi. Perhaps he thought we would be convinced of the impossibility of the journey we contemplated as soon as we reached the confines of Italian civilization. Possibly he knew nothing of our audacious project. For he let us go to Djedabia, an Arab village on the edge of the desert, where lived Sayed Riddha, brother of the Senussi Emir. Once there, we were in close contact with the Arabs who could get us camels and waterskins, a guide and the men necessary for so long and dangerous an expedition. We established ourselves in a blind-walled Arab house and were promptly supplied—by Italian agents—with servants who reported every move we made and every word they could overhear. In return, these men were watched by Sayed Riddha's spies, so we always knew what would be told to the Italians and we were able to supply false information when necessary. Plot and counterplot continued. It happened that I had damaged my foot by stumbling into a marble column one night in the Governor's palace in Bengazi. In the dark-

ness I had more or less telescoped my bare toes and my foot fortunately went black. It looked very nasty and for days I sat with it in a solution recommended by an agitated doctor who longed to operate. At Djedabia my obvious lameness was very useful. I could not use that foot and it was still swollen, so the Italian officers ordered to keep an eye on us believed I would not move.

They were mistaken. We did not wait for the big caravan necessary to cross the desert where, according to the Arabs, one "waits an hour for a dying camel and half an hour for a dying man". As soon as our Bedouin clothes had been tailored, in the secrecy of Sayed Riddha's house—as soon as arrangements had been made for camels and their drivers, for black fighting slaves to guard the caravan, for baggage saddles and date fodder and waterskins, for rice and new sandals and 'jerds', without which the desert men would not start on so long a journey, for a guide who had once and once only braved the perils of 'the terrible emptiness'—Hassanein Bey and I slipped out of Djedabia. It was a conspiratorial flight after midnight. We drugged the servants. We changed into Arab disguise and stealthily thrust into sacks what we could not do without. Before the moon rose, there was a soft sound at the door. Jusuf and Mohamed were waiting outside. They were devoted servants of Sayed Riddha and had been told "on your heads and in your eyes is the safety of this man and this woman".

Into the darkness we crept. I limped along as fast as I could, but the desert men had to help me. Camels were hidden in an old tomb. Hastily we mounted and turned towards the south. It was a false start. We wasted hours that first night wandering in circles because the Arabs would not trust my compass, and in their fear and excitement, they refused to recognize the north star.

Fanatics among the Senussi brethren had guessed our purpose, and although they dared not openly oppose Sayed Riddha, they were determined that the two foreigners should not live to reach 'holy Kufra'. It was all arranged. We were to be murdered on the way. Or, if this proved too difficult, in view of the soldier slaves who were to join us at the first desert wells, we were to be betrayed by the guide Abdullah. He had orders to lose us in the first sand-storm or to lead the whole caravan astray in the waterless waste where the only landmarks—then—were camel skeletons.

This threat of murder hung over us all the way to Kufra. After awhile we discovered the plot, together with the intentions of Abdullah. One day, I remember, Hassanein Bey and I had a long and serious discussion as to whether we should secretly kill him, before he had a chance to destroy us all. Thus, in the great deserts, moral values change. Murder may be a virtue as well as a commonplace necessity, but to drink another man's water is a sin beyond forgiveness. For on your 'girbas'—the goatskins treated with oil and tar so that the water they hold is always unpleasant to taste—depends the existence of the

caravan. If you ask a Saharan nomad how far it is to any place, he will reply, "As far as a man may walk on so many 'girbas'," calculating about a pint of water a day.

Of our journey to Kufra in the winter of 1920-21, I wrote at length in my book *The Secret of the Sahara*, but as it is now out of print, I must explain how that first long desert journey affected my character and outlook. For I lived month after month as an Arab and a Moslem. I consorted only with desert men, hard, loyal, and superstitious. Gradually I learned to know them. They were a strange mixture of courage and fears, of wisdom and childish simplicity. They were witty, coarse, chivalrous to a veiled woman, vastly enduring, beset by all manner of crude doubts, but unwavering in their spiritual faith. As we travelled at the slow pace of a baggage camel—rarely more than two miles an hour—further and further into the desert, I became part of the small, isolated brotherhood represented by our caravan. It was the purest socialism I have ever known, for no heed was paid to sex or colour or condition of living, and not much to age. We were all, I think, well under thirty. Experience took the lead, and when Abdullah 'lost his head'—a well-known desert disease—and nearly cost us our lives in waterless desert ten days' march from the last well, experience gave way to force of character. This last disaster was the culmination of difficult weeks. The camels had sickened on unaccustomed date fodder. We had been smothered by sand-storms and threatened by hostile villagers—attacked and blessed in turn. We were half starved before our caravan joined us fifteen days out from Djedabia. Later, we suffered very seriously from thirst between the rare oases. We were footsore after seventeen-hour marches, often sleepless and sometimes eaten by lice.

Through all this and much more than I can tell, Jusuf and Mohamed had stood by us. Then—after months of travel—we marched right through the pleasant green splash which indicated Kufra on our maps, and found ourselves still in the middle of hard, dark brown desert. It was flat as a gramophone disc, with a horizon so near and so completely round that it looked as if we might walk off the edge of it at any moment. Dismayed and exhausted, the Bedouin were ready to accept death as the 'will of Allah'. Mohamed said, "Wallahi, I would prefer to sit down comfortably and die beside my baggage." By this time I had become so imbued with the desert code and way of living that it was difficult for me to insist on initiative and sustain it. But, in view of the general acceptance of death as inevitable within the next twenty-four hours unless we found water—for we had nothing left in the 'girbas' and the camels had had no drink for eleven days and no green fodder for a month—I decided to march on a certain bearing. Acceptance of this I forced upon the fighting blacks and the Arabs.

When we could hardly see or speak and were dragging our feet

automatically across the sand, leaving blood or pus behind us, we came to a depression full of bones. It was a ghastly place. Abdullah regained sufficient of his head to recognize it as El Atash, which means 'the thirst'. Here, he said, whole caravans had lost themselves and died. The strongest blacks put up my tent beside grey skeleton bushes too tough for the hungry camels. They did not trouble to remove the bones with yellowed muscles clinging to them. Among these, I lay down. My throat was parched and so stiff that I could not swallow. The slaves cooked their rice—dry. We all talked—in rustling, cracked whispers—of 'to-morrow'.

Next morning, there was a damp mist. It saved our lives, for it relaxed our swollen throats and kept us from the last madness of thirst.

Subduing, with all the force left in me, a tendency among my companions to wander all over the place, I held the party steady on my compass bearing. In this direction, I was convinced, the Kufra oases must lie, but whether they were within a day's march or a month's I did not know.

The miracle happened. In mid-morning, while Mohamed was considering how much pleasure it would give him to shoot the guide, Abdullah, we came upon a 'khattab', which means soft sand with scraps of brittle vegetation. The blacks threw themselves down and scrabbled up the earth with their hands. Blind and sick we prayed. I found myself murmuring with the others, "Allah, the all merciful and compassionate," and in that moment was aware of universal God-head. This knowledge has never left me. 'There is no God but God'—one God, whoever be His Prophet. He has, I suspect, many, and those who live in our own age are, as yet, nameless.

We found water, brackish and discoloured. It was sufficient. We tore the straw stuffing out of the baggage saddles and on it fed the camels. We rested for twenty-four hours, lying for the most part, flat on our backs with eyes shut and faces covered against the sun and wind by woollen 'jerds'. They are like blankets, and I used to borrow one of the men's to wear over my thin, striped cotton barracan when it was too hot or too cold.

On the second morning we started again, marching south-south-east as I had determined. All day we saw nothing but mirage refracted from the blistering sands.

That night a very strange thing happened to Hassanein Bey. I did not write about it in my Kufra book, for it was an intimate, spiritual experience, but it has so much affected my life that, now, after twenty-two years, I must tell it. Unfortunately, I cannot make it sound as important as it was to us—young, hard-pressed and of different races, black, brown and white, with one purpose on which we depended for our lives, just preserved from death by thirst and still lost in unknown desert.

Throughout the journey from Djedabia, Hassanein Bey, who had

never thought of himself as a mystic, had been dreaming of a woman—white or in white. He could not exactly describe her. She had prophesied correctly but in symbolic language what did, in fact, happen to us. At first, we thought it was coincidence. At first, I dare say, we laughed about those visions. But when we were without food for ourselves or the camels, when, with almost undrinkable water in our 'girbas', we had no idea where Kufra lay, or if we had a chance of reaching the oasis, Hassanein had his first clear vision. He would not allow it was a dream.

The woman stood beside him in the desert where we camped. He could see her shadow in the starlight and the marks her feet made in the sand. She said, "Do not be troubled. You will reach Kufra, but you will have to break down three walls before you arrive. And at the end you will turn out of your path to avoid dead bodies."

Under the hot morning sun Hassanein Bey and I discussed the significance of this passage. We did not doubt its truth. The 'walls', we realized, would be obstacles, human or material, which we would have to overcome. We thought, probably, the 'dead bodies' indicated a fight.

That evening, I think, we saw the first 'gherds'—hard-backed dunes—of the outlying oases.

Three times in the following weeks we were held up by hostile tribesmen. We were imprisoned at Hawari in our own tent while fanatics discussed how and when we should be killed. Jusuf was smuggled secretly out of the camp. He stole a white mule and on it rode through the night to Kufra, where—with the letter we carried from Sayed Idris—he secured help. It arrived just in time. The 'third wall' was broken down.

On the last day among the dunes, we rounded one of the great sand-breakers, edged like a razor so that camels, slipping on the crest, may split two legs on either side. There, in a hollow—exactly in front of us, so that we had, literally, to turn out of our way to avoid them—were the bodies of a whole caravan which had died of thirst. The white woollen robes were still intact. The dried flesh still clung to the bones like rough yellow stuff.

Later on, Hassanein Bey had another vision. One night, in the great desert uncrossed by any known caravans, the woman, who seemed to him all white, came walking across the sand. She said, "Take off the chain you wear round your neck and come with me a little way up this sand-hill. Now bury it here—and in the morning when you come to find it, you will see your footsteps and mine. So you will know that you have not dreamed."

Hassanein did as he was told. When they came down from the slight rise, the woman told him, "You will suffer great pain and agony of mind. You will feel deserted by everyone—and betrayed. It will seem to you there is nothing of life left to you—but all this sorrow





will pass. You will be given more than you have ever wanted or imagined. You will be a great man, with power in your hands, with riches and honour around you. Do not fear. Thus it is written."

Hassanein Bey asked, "What of the woman who is with me? What will happen to her?"

He described to me next morning how the voice which spoke to him sounded puzzled. It became, in a way, more human and finite, as if it were sufficiently surprised to be a little dismayed. It said some such words as these, hesitating, with long pauses, "I do not know about her. She is not of our Faith. I do not understand why . . . but she will always be protected. That is certain. She will be surrounded by great danger, but it will never touch her. She will be in sorrow and distress, but always she will be safe. She cannot help it. It is not of her own wish. She will follow strange paths, leading towards death—but death will not come to meet her. It is written—she will be protected."

I do not suppose these are the exact sentences, but the puzzled voice repeated again and again that whatever I risked, whatever I suffered, protection would always be with me. There was no prophecy of happiness or success. But I would follow—in safety—the path upon which it was ordained that I should go.

So I have always believed. So it has always happened. Many times, I have been within a hair's breadth of death. Men with me have died—violently and in strange, sudden ways. But from me, death has deliberately turned aside.

In the green light of the false dawn which preludes Saharan sunrise, Hassanein Bey showed me his footsteps going up and down the sand-hill. Beside them, there were quite clear marks at regular intervals. I would have believed them made by bare feet pressing very lightly and with a wind ruffling the sand behind them.

In silence we looked at them. In silence we dug up the chain buried where Hassanein had described. The marks went off into the desert. We were then some hundred miles from any village or camp.

## CHAPTER VI

1921

### *Arrival in Kufra. Return to Egypt*

THE ARABS HAVE a proverb which runs, "Success is the price men pay for the right to venture." I thought of this when, for the first time—in January, 1921—we saw from rising ground the long strip of Kufra oasis in a valley twenty-seven miles long. It was terribly hot. We were exhausted. I had just said to Hassanein Bey, "I don't believe Kufra

exists at all. I believe it is a monstrous joke which Africa, for centuries, has played on Europe." Then the hard gramophone disc desert began to tilt upwards. The horizon narrowed to meet us. It was a red land, sombre and ominous. I have never seen such colouring in any other part of the world. For the sands of Kufra are the colour of faded geranium petals, hot and tired.

Suddenly, we saw a rent in the heart of the desert. Below, as if it had been torn out of the earth, there was a valley surrounded by brilliantly-striped cliffs. For the shales and sandstones of Kufra are of many different colours. We saw them as an angry sunset—with three very blue lakes like the sky between evening clouds. Beside the lakes, were palm-groves and a blinding white salt marsh. We could see the ruins of Tebu houses, made out of the hard salt crust. On the top of the cliff—within arm's reach, it seemed—was Taj, the holy place of the Senussi brotherhood, and in the valley, the market town of Jof. For a while we looked down—in silence—upon the mud-built houses. In those days, men slaves could be bought for some fifteen pounds apiece in the square in front of the mosque. For women, it was necessary to bargain behind the windowless walls. A girl might fetch as high as thirty-seven pounds.

It was Mohamed who first broke into speech. The rest of us were awed by the knowledge of achievement. "Wallahi!" exclaimed the lean, dark Bedouin. "It is beautiful and I am grateful, but how I want to sleep!" He wound himself into his 'jerd' and lay down in the nearest soft sand. I did the same—with a blanket over my head. One by one, the men followed our example.

It was not till evening that we made dignified entry into the 'holy place'.

There, in Taj, we stayed for ten days, living as Arabs in a house belonging to one of the Senussi 'ekhwān'.<sup>1</sup> We were hospitably received by the leaders of the Tariq,<sup>2</sup> because of Sidi Idris's letter, but when we went down into the valley to see Jof and to ride the length of the depression wherein villages and camps were scattered, the Zouia tribesmen made several attempts to kill us.

Abdullah was still plotting. He had no intention of returning to the justice of Sayed Riddha at Djedabia, and he planned that no one of us should go North again to tell what he had done. We heard that he was arranging with fanatics in the outlying oases, where we had had so much trouble on the southward journey, to have us murdered when we went back through the 'sea of sand'. There the great dunes rise, strong and angry like a storm in mid-ocean. Among them, caravans disappear. Bodies are easily lost.

We were warned in time and we changed our plans.

After ten days in Kufra we started straight for Egypt, with four

<sup>1</sup> Brethren of the order.

<sup>2</sup> Way of living, literally, path.

camels. There were only six of us, Mohamed and Jusuf, a student who wanted to go to the Senussi Zawia at Jaghabub and an old Bedouin, who was to be our guide. He thought that if he put 'the north star in the middle of his forehead and the south star at the back of his neck' he would—if Allah willed—reach known ground at the other side of the dread desert. Neither tribesmen nor the Senussi brethren ventured to go by this direct way, without wells for more than three hundred miles. But it seemed to us our only chance.

Once again we fled—by night and without warning. Only the religious leaders of Taj were in our confidence. They gave us a document which I still possess. It runs: "On the blessed day of Friday, the 3rd of Jamad el Awal, 1339, there came to our town in Kufra the honoured Ahmed Mohammed Hassanein Bey, the Egyptian, son of Sheikh Mohammed Hassanein el Bulaki, professor of the honoured Azhar, and the Lady Khadija. They were carrying the orders of our great prince Sayed Mohammed Idris el Mahdi es Senussi and, according to his exalted orders, we met them with all honour and respect and thanked Allah for their safe arrival to us, and hoped of Him their safe return." It is signed by 'the Second Adviser of Kufra', 'the Judge', 'the Adviser', and 'the Wakil (steward) of the Sayed at Kufra'. After each name is written 'May Allah forgive him'.

Our return journey was without battle. One night, we sat up in the north-eastern dunes, expecting to be attacked. Our rifles were ready. Our hearts beat high. We were not afraid, for we had plenty of ammunition and we were good shots. But we were excited to the pitch of exaltation. It was an amazing night.

The moon was bright as a midday sun, but the light was heavier. Shadows on the deep, red sand were a rich purple. We crouched behind convenient crests in a world of hot amber and the reddish-purples of Ingres, when—at his most luscious—he painted judges' robes. My heart ached for the beauty and the passion of that colouring.

I had been well-fed for a fortnight and was no longer tired. The Bedouin 'wireless', which none of us can explain, had reported an armed band looking for us. As I lay with my right hip in the sand and the barrel of my rifle dulled so that no gleam of starlight on its steel could betray us, I wanted—furiously—to live. I wanted to reach Cairo in safety. I remembered that I was in love. But, even then, I knew I was not so much in love with a man as with his inspiration. He had shared with me his deep understanding of the Arabs and pledged me to their service. So he had given me a future. For—as I have said—no Torr can be happy without an uncomfortable and unsuitable purpose.

All that night among the dunes, we kept watch. Nothing came but one small, grey desert mouse. So still we were, behind our rifles, that it ran across Hassanein Bey's 'jerd'.

With the sunrise we were away into the great desert, safe from

pursuit. Twelve days, we travelled, to the next water, and that I believe is a record—with no green vegetation for the camels. We had not time or strength to pitch a tent. We marched as much as seventeen hours a day. The camels carried our food and water and their own fodder. When our feet gave out we rode a little, but not much. Once, Jusuf asked, "Sitt Khadija, what is Allah's greatest gift to man?"

"The Koran," I answered sternly.

"Wallahi, women have no sense," said Jusuf. "It is the camel. For how could we live without him?"

We were 'all in' when we reached Jaghabub, another holy place. It contained the tomb of a Senussi saint and had been for two generations a centre of religious instruction. There we were hospitably received by the learned Sheikhs and, after a few days, allowed to go on our way towards Egypt. But we had not been able to buy more camels. Ours were exhausted.

One brilliant night, in the Northern dune belt, we heard the 'desert drums'. It sounded as if the earth's pulses were beating, so near that they might have been under our feet. It was awe-full, but not frightening. Jusuf, who enjoyed gloom, hurried to explain that the drummers were the spirits of men who had died in the desert. It was their roll-call. They were summoning us to their ranks.

"Nonsense," I said, but without much force. I was very tired. Mohamed, always our greatest source of strength, had been left, in the last stages of exhaustion, at Jaghabub. I missed him and felt lonely. Around us, the dunes, silvered and cold in the moonlight, were impersonal and relentless as the ocean in a great storm.

Hassanein Bey stood up on his camel to see further across the breakers. He slipped and smashed his collar-bone. After that, the journey was a nightmare. Jusuf was delighted because his prophecy of disaster had been fulfilled.

I set Hassanein's broken bone and bound up arm and shoulder with some of my eleven yards of red woollen sash. We had morphia with us, but we had to get on towards Egypt. We had little food or water, for our tired camels could not carry big loads.

Only at night could Ahmed Bey, an international fencer, take refuge in drugs. Through one long, agonized day after another, he had to ride. It was rough country. His weary camel stumbled and slid among the stones. However often I set it, the march was bound to jolt the ends of his collar-bone until they parted. Without a murmur, Hassanein Bey endured. But his courage was greater than his strength. It was his first adventurous journey. He had not been accustomed to days of hard riding, like the daughters of Lincolnshire squires. I was brought up in a saddle and had my first pony at four. Thereafter, I was expected to ride anything, and if it came down with me, to break as few bones as intelligent falling could contrive. There is certainly

an art about falling. I have done a lot of it—but only once made an omelette of my ribs.

At last, it was obvious that Hassanein Bey could go no further. Scarcely conscious, he rolled in the saddle. No amount of morphia stopped the pain. His shoulder was a horrible sight. So we pitched the tent under a dune and left him with food and waterskins and a Bedouin to look after him. Jusuf and I took the best camel and set out with one 'girba' and a minimum of subsistence for four days. We had to reach Siwa, over the Egyptian border, or there would be an end to us.

One night, tramping over rough ground, between great distorted 'gherds'—the hard-backed dunes wind-swept and sun-scorched into fantastic shapes—we heard sounds of men and beasts. Wearily Jusuf said, "Get out your revolver, Sitt Khadija. No good people march at night." Prepared for raiders, we crept round a sandhill. Then I heard a voice whistling, 'Britannia Rules the Waves'. Next moment we could see the neatly-couched camels of the frontier District Administration. They belonged to a patrol which Lord Allenby—hearing of our journey from the Tripolitanian authorities—had sent out to look for us. I shall never forget that moment. Often I have been asked what was the happiest thing in all your journeys. I do not know. But I expect for the rest of that amazing night I was as happy as it is possible to be. On a trotting dromedary—tall, white, blue-eyed, of the famous Thibesti breed—I led the way back to where Hassanein waited. Then camp was pitched. Dung fires blazed. There was no longer any danger. Men in khaki did for me all the things which for months I had done for myself. Hassanein Bey's shoulder was re-set by hands more skilled than mine. He was propped against rolled sheepskins. There was hot tea with milk, unknown to the desert. There were sausages—pig's flesh, forbidden to Islam. There were cigarettes after many months of Senussi austerity. I was excited and thankful and wildly happy. But I was also very sad. There was a physical pain in my heart, for the journey had ended. Adventure died beside that English camp-fire. So did Khadija, daughter of Abdullah Fahmi, with her Circassian slave mother—and all the close bonds of desert love and friendship. I would have to grow back again into my English skin. That night, it seemed to me shrunken and mis-shaped.

## CHAPTER VII

*Late Spring, 1921*

### *In The Middle East*

CAIRO WAS FUN. The great figure in those days was Lord Allenby. He had a pet crane which used to walk round the Residency garden, suiting its pace to that of H.E.'s guests. If it did not care for the number of their buttons it would stretch out a long beak and forcibly pluck off a few. The Allenbys gave a dinner for me. It was my first official party. I was thrilled. At the further end of the table the following conversation took place, and was subsequently reported to me :

KINDLY ENTHUSIAST : "That was a grand journey of Rosita's," etc., etc.

PRACTICAL DOWAGER : "I dare say it was—but she seems to me comparatively young. I think she'd be better occupied at home, having babies."

NERVOUS A.D.C. (anxious that everybody should be pleased) : "I am sure you are quite right, Lady X, but you see she—er—she hasn't got a husband."

There was more of such talk—at more and more dinners. Everybody was kind—and also curious. Even the Queen of Egypt, a lovely woman strictly secluded, asked me, "*Why* did you *want* to go to Kufra?" How could I explain! It was certainly *not* for ambition. I travelled—like Elroy Flecker's merchants in *Hassan*—for lust of knowledge and in answer to the deep, aching need I had to learn more about the desert and its life. It had not occurred to me that it would make me—for the moment—famous. All I thought of, from the practical point of view, was whether I could sell my camels for sufficient to repay the money I had borrowed to supply equipment and camp material.

Colonel Forth was then in command at Siwa, and I remember he was profoundly shocked because I wanted to sell the huge, blond beast which had taken me to Kufra and back. He was the nicest man I have ever met and I think the best. We became great friends. I was then—quite definitely—in love with somebody else, but I admired him beyond measure. He is dead now. So I can say that with his fantastic courage and generosity, his selfless simplicity, he comes nearest to what I believe Christ must have been among His friends on earth.

At the time I was too young to realize this. Back in Cairo, turning my notes into a book and my compass traverse into a map, I got up early to ride Colonel Forth's big black charger in the tame desert

beyond Mena House. With him, later on, I made a luxurious camel journey into the Western desert. General Hunter and a delightful young man called Frank de Halpert, who did hospital work for the Abyssinians in their war against Italy, were with us, but always a long way behind. Alone, it seemed to us at the time, Colonel Forth and I rode into the land of the fortified Coptic monasteries. Somewhere ahead was a whole company of the Camel Corps. They put up our tents at midday and in the evening. We had real baths and good food. It was utterly delightful—and my official reward for Kufra. It was also my escape from 'fame'.

For it happened that there was no important news at the moment. So the European press blazed the tale of our Kufra journey. Hassanein Bey was obliged to stay in bed. His broken bone was slow to mend. So I had nobody to help me. *The Times* correspondent extracted from me about six columns and cabled them to England. My family read them in Eaton Square with enormous relish. It was the first time—except out hunting—that my father was proud of me. I am so glad he had this pleasure, for his internal illness, which lasted ten years before it killed him and which—true to his faith—he bore with unflinching courage and patience, was then beginning. So often he had been disappointed in me, for—inheriting his gift of speech and much of his enthusiasm for unpopular causes—I was ready to sacrifice myself for the material benefit of anybody oppressed, but *not* for what I considered 'spiritual unreason'. So, when we were not on horseback, my father and I saw life from different angles. Herbert Torr could tolerate every failing but those of sex. To me, in the words of La Rochefoucauld, "the act of the flesh has so little importance". I could not even disapprove of my first husband because he was habitually unfaithful. I divorced him because his temper became unbearable.

With the success of my journey to Kufra, I ministered to my father's pride. He was the more pleased and happy, because—for the sake of his principles—he had himself consented to be a failure. In this I admire him enormously, because it was a deliberate choice. For myself, I have slipped from failure to failure, because I have always wanted to do too much, but my father chose failure when success was possible and easy. So, to my mind, he stands apart—and justified.

To escape from journalists who waylaid me at all times—even hiding in my bedroom when I refused interviews—from photographers and people who, to my astonishment, asked for autographs or stood on chairs to look at me, I went far out into the country with the charming person I loved. We sat upon cliffs above the Nile in that short, heart-breaking hour, when dusk gathers the sunset clouds as if they were flowers. We talked a lot about ourselves and still more about the Arabs. We drove in starlight to the tombs of the Mamelukes and found in their haunted loneliness—bats and jackals our only companions—the poignant emotion we wanted. I do not think it was

artificial, but it was stimulated by the spectacular background both of circumstance and place.

Too much happened to me in the next months. I cannot tell it all. Back to Palestine and Syria and into Asia Minor I went, anxious, I think, to find freedom from being in love as well as to run away from being 'famous'. The *Sunday Times* was to serialize my book. Cassells would publish it in England and Doubleday Doran in America. Agents cabled from London, "Come back, or your story will get cold." I did not care.

In Anatolia I met Mustapha Kemal, the creator of modern Turkey. Georges Picot, the incautious little French consul in Syria, whose office safe contained enough written dynamite to blow his supporters out of Asia Minor, had just negotiated a frontier treaty with that imaginative firebrand Mark Sykes and the adventurous de Bouillon, political soldier of fortune who made history with his tongue. France was uncertain what was going to happen among the Turks. She wanted to know. So the Colonel commanding in Aleppo, being logical, as is the way of his race, took the simplest way to find out. "Madame," he said, "it seems you are *du dernier bien* with all these rogues in the mountains. I will lend you a horse—two if you prefer—and France will be grateful for your news." I accepted a stallion and a pack-pony, but committed myself to nothing. Riding one animal and dragging the other after me, accompanied by a Kurd in vast, ballooning trousers and a turban the size of a prize pumpkin, I crossed into Anatolia and, after a time—because nobody knew what to do with me—was allowed to reach Kemal's doorstep.

The greatest man I have known—and I think the most sensible, for however superb his vision, he trimmed it to the limits of possibility—was seated on a packing-case cutting a splinter out of his bare foot. It was most unromantic.

In those days Halideh Hanoum was his Egeria. He would do nothing without her. He defeated Greece, armed and backed by the whole weight of the Allies, with this amazing girl at his side. She tore off her veil and tied it to a Turkish bayonet, as her own people drove, triumphant and tumultuous towards the sea.

The first thing the future Atatürk said to me was, "I suppose you are a missionary. Nobody else could be so interfering." I was hugely complimented, for I admire such 'interference'—unarmed and unafraid—healing, teaching, often bothered, inelegant and muddled, but working hard 'in season and out of season'. I retorted that I was just an ordinary traveller. "Oh," said Kemal, and I cannot remember another word. But somehow I arranged to stay in the local school-house and to spend all my time with Atatürk and his extraordinary household. There was a cousin, Fikriye Hanoum, who adored him, and Colonel Arif, his foster-brother, who had fought the great war at his side, much of it on Gallipoli, saved his life in battle and deserted



to join his idol in Anatolia. He was destined to be hanged years later by order of the leader who loved him, but would not let even his best friend stand in the way of his plans for Turkey. There was Osman Agha, Captain of the black Lazz bodyguard, who slept across his door and who was never embarrassed by bodies. He enjoyed both producing them—with a knife—and disposing of them.

There must have been others, but I forget, because Kemal dominated the scene. He became my hero. Feisul I loved as the first and loyalest of my friends. He helped me on every Eastern journey. In London and in Baghdad, we found refuge in each other's wits and plans and different but equally impossible ideals. But the Arab King's tendency to compromise at times disturbed me. Kemal was ruthless and hard. He always knew what he wanted and—at tremendous personal cost, at the expense also of Kurds, Armenians and Jews—he accomplished it.

To me Atatürk and Roosevelt are the outstanding figures of my own lifetime. They are complete opposites, for one was a great soldier and, by force of circumstances, a dictator. The other is at heart a socialist and certainly a lover of peace. Both had the same driving force and the same overwhelming vitality, so that they were like strong winds. Both knew the exact extent of what they achieved and how far they could use the tools humanity provides. Neither deceived himself. Both were brilliantly intelligent in the necessary deception—or should it be the conviction—of others.

Both have done well by their own people and the world at large. Kemal made modern Turkey and brought her into the European comity. Roosevelt may re-shape a hemisphere. Only he, I think, is sufficiently far away from the storm centres to be able to gauge the measure of destruction and its course.

## CHAPTER VIII

1921

*Cairo. England. Arthur. Attempted Pilgrimage to Mecca*

WHILE I LINGERED in the Middle East, meeting many strange people and watching the Turkey of to-day take shape, I received a sudden telegram, "Come back at once. I will meet you anywhere. Do not hesitate. Come back to me."

It was from my friend in Cairo and it shook me out of my political and intellectual curiosities. Like perfume on a summer night, it stirred me to dangerous recollections. So I did not resist my heart or my imagination. Back I went to Cairo.

The Egyptian capital was then the centre of the negotiations which led to the Emir Feisul's acceptance of the Iraq throne. It is typical of

my queer, muddled nature that, having hurried to Cairo for the sake of a man, I immediately became involved in the Arab Question. So I can not remember all the pleasing things I must have done. There were dances, no doubt, and rides, an enormous new hat with hoop 'ear-rings' hanging from it, lobsters and strawberries in Shepherd's grill. It seems to me that I was always with Gertrude Bell, Colonel Cornwallis or the shy, brilliant, perturbed and self-distorted Colonel Lawrence. Some of the meetings were held in my sitting-room. There the Emir talked to me—at great length—about 'the United States of Arabia', but he did not want to go to Baghdad. Still regarding himself as a Bedouin, he feared the climate and town life. Colonel Lawrence, who had an extraordinary passion for mystery, exaggerated the complexity of the situation by insisting on secret rendezvous at a small, silent house out at Meidi, but I do not think he contributed anything of value to the discussions. He was a peculiar character, for his fears were as great as his courage. He should, I think, have remained faithful to his intellect and not allowed his imagination and the sense of adventure, spiritual as well as physical, which so well served Britain during the war, to pervert his character. For, without the stability or the moral force to serve an unpopular cause 'through the heat and burden' of post-war years among office files, he betrayed the Arabs by inanition.

Deliberately he fostered legend, so that among the ignorant he is now admired for things he did not do and events in which he played no part at all. His brains were exceptional, but his mind was not on the same level. He had the most fantastic craving for publicity and achieved it by a simulated distaste for limelight. This satisfied his inferiority complex, but always had the opposite effect to the one supposedly required. Colonel Lawrence, as a leader, came to an end with the war. Thereafter he laboured only on intellectual and scientific paths. These could have brought him deserved and sufficient laurels, but, in childish fashion, he hankered after the bright baubles he pretended to despise. For them he made unnecessary sacrifices. Pride and truth left him. But he was—in part—so remarkable a man that what remained of him, stripped of false pretences, sufficed for the admiration of his friends. I do not think it was enough for his own heart, so bitter and in some ways so generous. He was very nearly great. At times he was very small indeed. This he knew, for nobody could be more clear-sighted, or, when he chose, more deliberately blind. So, being unable to bear his own limitations, Colonel Lawrence sought refuge—like an ostrich—in the anonymity of Private Shaw. But, as the bird he decided to resemble, he left so much of himself sticking out of his disguise that he assured the recognition he coveted—and pretended to avoid.

I had first met him in London in 1920. We were introduced by Colonel Alan Dawnay then at the War Office. Dining once or twice

with the inexorably cultivated yet intuitive and always imaginative archaologist and historian, I was puzzled by the way notoriety attended whatever we did. In the greatest secrecy we met. The next day even what we had eaten was reported.

In Cairo, I understood Colonel Lawrence better. At that time Arabs in their national dress were not allowed in the halls of Shephard's Hotel. The Emir Feisul passed unnoticeably in European clothes. Colonel Lawrence sat drinking coffee in the great rotunda wearing an 'abba' and 'kufiya'. "Why?" I asked him with the rage and ignorance of youth. "I don't want to be recognized," he replied. I cannot believe the pretence satisfied the modesty he perhaps tried to cultivate. Naturally it ensured that every stranger asked, "Who is the sheikh for whom exception is made?"

I remember the final meeting at which Feisul, in deference to his life-long friend Colonel Cornwallis—now Sir Kinahan and successful British Ambassador in Baghdad—agreed to be King of Iraq. Reluctant, the Emir allowed himself to be persuaded, but only on condition that the man he most trusted should be released from the Egyptian service to go with him. A telegram to that effect was sent to the Colonial Office. Colonel Lawrence begged Feisul to ask for him as an alternative to Cornwallis. The Emir refused. He wanted only one man, his friend, who for the next ten years worked with him in the post of Adviser to the Ministry of the Interior in Baghdad. The partnership was close. It was founded on a vision of Arab unity and it lasted till the King died.

On my way home from Cairo, I stopped in Paris to see the French friends I had made during the autumn of the Peace Conference. They were gaily and ingeniously hospitable, logical, well informed, brilliantly expressive, and interested in the state of the world as if it were provocative literature. Fresh from the simplicity of the desert and the battling faiths of the Middle East, I was too earnest for such an atmosphere. In vain, witty and lovely women made me buy the enormous hats and the elaborate clothes familiar in those days. Senses in Paris were in the ascendant. Sense struggled feebly with the luxuries of a rising market and a political conscience so thoroughly disillusioned that it was 'sick of many plagues'.

Overdressed—and prodigiously hatted—I returned to London in time for my brother Tony's wedding. He was such a charming person, a third secretary then in the Diplomatic Service, just posted to Rome. We were a little alike, for we were driven to despair by our uncomfortable qualities, and to swift, passing delights by our enthusiasms. But Tony had far the better brain, and a genius for making and keeping friends. He was as distraught by conscience, and even less prepared to make concession to convenience, but his torch was a flame, blinding him to the needs of ordinary life. Mine is no more than a rush-light flickering in every draught. It was right that Tony should marry

an exceptional woman—who could never for a moment lose him. At times, he must have been incredibly difficult to live with, for he had a profusion of the loveliest talents. They lay about, in disconcerting shape, waiting—like so many people's tact—to trip anyone moving with normal haste. But Maude Walpole, with her slow, sweet charm, at first barely perceptible, then utterly irresistible, held—and holds—him for ever. There can never have been any effort between them—sorrow, perhaps, for they were both difficult and very 'fine' in the French sense of the word. Yet always there was in them both ultimate understanding and loyalty. I am so glad to have Maude as a sister-in-law, and so glad Tony had her for the years of his bewildered growth and his unceasing search. In her he found all that a woman could give him and much, I think, which life taught him. Far more successfully than I, he was able to extricate himself from his upbringing. Truth—or at least what truth meant to him—he found I believe in Rome when he was First Secretary at our Legation to the Vatican, in 1938.

He died in Berne three years later. But he is one of the people for whom it is clear there is no death except as a station platform. On to it stepped Tony from the lighted and crowded train which is life. Noisily, the engine puffed away. The small, brilliant compartments, so busy and self-absorbed passed on their habitual business. In his turn Tony walked off into the dusk which to the eyes peering out of life, seemed darkness. For him, I think, it was no more than a matter of blinking before he saw in it much clearer than we do here. I love Tony very much.

I disappointed and puzzled him a lot. I was more practical than he, equally sensitive, but less honest. My vision grew tattered. His, I think—to the exasperation at times, of his friends—was so clear that ordinary life went out of focus. He could not and did not try to fit into it. But he had such charm and often such understanding kindness that he was forgiven for the complex trouble he caused. He could habitually feel and say the right thing, which is sometimes more encouraging than doing it. So the world of his considered choice lost a lot in my brother Tony.

I saw him happiest at his wedding. Maude, with gracious instinct, had told my mother, "There will never be anybody but Tony." I believe she was right. She made him happier than anybody else could have done.

It was such a gay summer for us all. My father had made a fortune in Mexican Eagles. He lost it later, but for the moment he could give his generosity full play. For the moment my entrancing mother could have everything she wanted for us. We hoped she had a few grown-up toys for herself.

In London there was still much excitement over my Kufra journey. I remember a mist of reporters, photographers, public lunches and

dinners, speeches, speeches, always speeches, a National Testimonial headed by the signature of the Prince of Wales, an audience with King George and Queen Mary, who sat, one on each side of me, on a gilt sofa, and each held a corner of my precious map—the first of the Libyan desert. I was afraid it would tear and clung desperately to the middle.

The King was shrewd, kindly and amused. His conversation was intimate and charged with personal detail. He showed prodigious knowledge of the Empire, but was misinformed about certain aspects of the Middle East. To cite an unimportant one, he thought only Colonel Lawrence had been to Mecca. Dr. Hogarth, in his studious work *The Penetration of Arabia* gives a list of over thirty. A cousin of Field-Marshal Wavell's, and a connection therefore of my husband's, made one of the most successful pilgrimages. Burton, of course, was a famous Hadji, and the Dutchman whom my husband and I visited at Leiden—Snouck Hougronje—not only made pilgrimage to the Ka-aba, but lived for months in Mecca. There were many others. I do not know if Colonel Lawrence went or not. The testimony I heard in the Hedjaz was contradictory.

Queen Mary, I thought, was shy but extremely well informed. I liked her dignity, the perfection of her appearance, and the way she had evidently learned her job. She seemed to me conscious of the work she did and determined it should be good.

In the middle of all this excitement, Lady Kennard, the wife of a diplomat and daughter of Sir George Barclay, once Ambassador to Turkey, telephoned me. I must come and dine. She wanted me to meet an Irishman, a Colonel then in M.I. At that time Dorrie Kennard was a great friend of mine. She was intensely reserved and full of painful complexes, which eventually destroyed her. She was austere and divided against herself, in love with her husband and deeply hurt by various things. I have never known anyone more vulnerable.

I went to dinner. I met Arthur McGrath. I remember I wore deep, rose-coloured lace, silken and heavy. I had a small, absurd car—most of it aluminium. I was very proud of it. Colonel McGrath put me into it as if it were a jewel-box, but did not offer to see me home. I was disappointed.

Some days later, I was giving a second lecture to the Royal Geographical Society. The hall was overcrowded. When all the seats had been filled, people were still trying to push in from the street. A cord had been put up, and behind it stood the erudite Secretary, Arthur Hinks. I was frightened of him. Sternly he said to me, "Mrs. Forbes, I have already let in three fathers and two mothers and heaven knows how many brothers. The elasticity of your family can really not be stretched any further."

At that moment, I saw Colonel McGrath pushing through the crowd. The Chief of his section at the War Office, Colonel Twiss, was with

him. Sir William Thwaites, Director of Military Intelligence, was also looking for a seat. Desperately, I turned to the impregnable uprightness of Mr. Hinks. "That man must come in," I said.

In a moment I ceased to be a solemn lecturer. The label of 'famous explorer' which I have always detested, crumbled into insignificance. Across the unnoticeable, ordinary heads, the fashionable and the informed, I saw Arthur's gay eyes which still have such power to hurt or help me. I knew "that man" was the most attractive I had ever met. If he could not come in, there would be no lecture.

Arthur Hinks was looking at me with disapproval. I did not care. To the eminent geographer's "Why *that* man particularly?" I retorted, "I'm engaged to him."

The tension relaxed. Immediately the atmosphere warmed. "Of course," said Mr. Hinks. "He must sit on the platform."

On a flood-tide of smiles, Arthur and I were borne together. Irresistibly, we were swept into the 'high places' reserved. The imposing Sir William, I regret to say, was forgotten altogether. He eventually squashed himself into the gallery where, with Colonel Twiss, destined to equal eminence in India, sitting half on top of him, he raged, "Look at that fellow, Arthur McGrath. How the devil has he got himself on to the platform?"

Puzzled, no doubt, but showing no signs of it, the good-looking Irishman had a minute alone with me. "Let's have supper together afterwards," he suggested. "Yes," I said. "Of course. But—I'm so sorry—I had to say you were my fiancé."

"Intelligent anticipation," retorted Colonel McGrath.

"Oh!" I said.

In fact, I was already engaged to have supper with the first man who had given me any satisfactory emotion. I had loved him perhaps, or in him loved love at the very beginning of my queer complicated life, so self-conscious, so prepared for block or altar. He was already an M.P., but still—lingeringly—an Australian. We had not seen much of each other for the last two years. I do not think he seriously wanted to marry me. I had once been much influenced by him. Australia to me still means all the things he and I did together. I see him against a haze of corn, innumerable horses, a huge grey house and blue gum trees. There were lots of young people about, including the lovely Sheila Milbanke. I remember moonlight nights camping on the Murrumbidgee and all of us riding loose-reined, wild and gay, leaping tree-trunks, mooning possums. How young we were! How happy! I was married to Ronald Forbes, but he did not like horses. He was not in any of those scenes in which walers, endlessly galloping, played so large a part.

Next to the sun, horses have given me most joy and men least. I am not clever with men. I only get on with them when they will consent to be friends, linked in some hard-working purpose, generally

international. Then I am content with them and—for a while—can establish a satisfactory personal relationship.

In this manner, Australia belongs—in my mind—to the rather hard, very intelligent egotist and sentimentalist who to-day is a successful politician.

The Paris of the Peace Conference is confused with the gay half-Italian sailor, and Egypt with the man who taught me to work for the Arabs and know them.

These were my friends before I knew Arthur. Shamelessly, I mislaid the Australian, to sup—indifferently, on scrambled eggs—with the Irishman. My future was at once assured or—according to Violet Trefusis, writer and lover of life, wise and foolish in her eclectic aspect of time—endangered. For, if I wanted to do a good job, as interpreter of one race to another, as a traveller without home or ties, without loyalty except to peoples and ideals, I should not have married. Perhaps no travellers should marry. For they need all their hearts and wits and harshness to struggle with difficulties, official, geographical, physical and material, as well as with the doubts of their own souls. But how could I help marrying when once I met Arthur! I never had a chance.

The *Daily Mail* published our engagement the day after the lecture. We denied it. I did not even know the man's Christian name. Why he wanted to marry me, I cannot conceive. All his friends were right in opposing it. I did myself. I refused him with determination. I went to the Hedjaz, hoping to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in Arab disguise. I had an Egyptian passport acquired with the help of the local police. I wanted to pray by the Ka-aba. It was an overwhelming spiritual longing. For months in the Libyan desert I had lived and thought as an Arab. I had seen the faith of Islam at its best. I wanted to see the heart of it in Mecca.

Unfortunately, I had just had a minor operation which left me tired and subject to sickness. I was also obsessed by Arthur, to whom—doubtful and reluctant—I had at the last minute become engaged.

It was a late August pilgrimage. The boat from Suez to Jedda was crowded. Each human being was supposed to have three square feet of space on deck. Actually they were heaped and layered one on top of another. I had with me an Egyptian servant who, believing that I really was the Moslem Khadija, did nothing to help me conceal my peculiarities. When the white sheets of pilgrim dress are put on, women discard their veils. Previously they purify their bodies with a communal rite of ablution. I had a haemorrhage in the steaming, sweltering bath and another in a sailing-boat massed high with humanity. We were then on the way to Gezira, the pilgrim quarantine isle. Illness I had not anticipated. Consequently, I had not learned the religious observances required. The women were surprised and puzzled. My grey eyes, set flat like a Circassian's, would have passed

notice. My long, thin hands were always a danger. The pilgrim garments revealed too much skin. Were it not for my sojourn in hospital, I could have become sunburned. Were it not for Arthur, I could have dyed myself completely brown. It would have worn off in a year or so. But already, I was half-hearted. I would not risk such looks as I possessed!

Suspicion flared in the open boat, under the germinating heat of the sun. Men were faint and women ill. Fanaticism was the necessary tonic. "*Heya kafira*," the cry went up. "She is an infidel."

Shocked, angry, appalled, the friends I had made during those glutinous, those coagulated days on board in a temperature of over 130 Fahrenheit, rallied round me. The insult was too great. "Say the Fatha," ordered a motherly, dark African.

Obediently, I recited the first 'sura'<sup>1</sup> of the Koran.

Suspicion was momentarily quelled, but it must have remained in the heads of the least tolerant.

On Gezira, several pilgrims died from exposure—in the great heat—and from lack of water. Their companions held the bodies upright, or relaxed against friendly shoulders as if they were asleep. So the quarantine officer did not—or would not—suspect.

Forced into undesirable publicity by my friends who could not speak Egyptian—who with one corpse and several sick on their hands wanted quick passage to the mainland—I was obliged to talk to the quarantine doctor. I do not know what he thought of me.

Disaster overtook the felucca, in which, after much too forceful argument on my part, we sailed into Jedda harbour. There was a collision. We were all upset into the water. When I was dragged out of it, I had lost my pilgrim sheet. Brown, curly hair looked not at all Egyptian. Worse still, in one of the rescuing craft was the steward of King Hussein whom I had known in Cairo. He could not help recognizing me.

In Jedda I had all sorts of adventures. I lived among the pilgrims of the sect I had chosen to follow. I made friends and talked Arab politics in the house of Bakr Hanawi, the 'muftariq'<sup>2</sup> of the Hanafi.

One morning, while I climbed the stairs of the British Consulate—safely veiled and in the white 'chram'<sup>2</sup>—Colonel Lawrence and Hadad Pasha, representing the Hedjaz in England, came down them. "Look at that woman," said the Arab. "She has fine eyes." Lawrence pushed on. "They all have skin disease under their veils," he retorted.

Plot and counter-plot developed around me. In my Moslem disguise, I had audiences with the Emir Abdullah, ruler of Trans-Jordania, and with his younger brother, Zeid, whom I had known in Syria. If I had been willing to accept the faith of Islam and let my conversion

<sup>1</sup> Verse.

<sup>2</sup> 'Muftariq', religious guide of the Sunni sect Hanafi; 'chram', pilgrim garb.



be published in the Kibla,<sup>1</sup> I could have gone to Mecca. But to this—in keeping with my ridiculously divided principles—I would not agree. For me, there is one God under many names. Christian, Buddhist, Mohammedan, no doubt a hundred other creeds worship the same fundamental Godhead—‘Co-equal and Co-eternal’. So there was no logical reason why I should not call my God by the name of Allah. By the Ka-aba, I would have worshipped Him as such, as I had done day after day in the desert, as I would do again on many an Arab journey.

But I could not agree to dictated and publicized conversion. I have no idea why I chose to give up the deepest need of my spirit at that moment. With it, I sacrificed success, my standing with *The Times*, which was paying for the expedition, and the five thousand pounds which Lord Northcliffe had promised me for the tale of the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

I had to do it. There was never any choice in my mind. Even for Mecca—and what represented to me security and a fortune—I could not betray something in myself inherited and traditional. I cannot give it a name. It may be the pride of English blood which can not bear dictation. It may be a feeling, deep-rooted as life itself—homage to the Cross of Christ. I still do not know. “*Enti magnuna*.” You are mad, said the Wakil of the Hadj<sup>2</sup> who liked me, for I could discuss with him religious philosophy and the history of his people.

I agreed. Indeed, I believed it madness to give up so much. Deeply hurt, ashamed, confused, I returned to England.

On the station platform, at night, waiting for a train at the junction between Suez and Cairo, I first met Sir Ronald Storrs. He was hurrying towards the women’s waiting-room, hoping to find it empty, and intent on sleep. So was I. We reached the door together. Wrapped now in my Egyptian ‘habbara’ and veiled, I turned on the Christian Governor of Palestine. As a virago I upbraided him for violating the age-old rights of Moslem woman. He apologized and retired in good order. In the waiting-room I changed into English clothes. The failure was finished and complete.

A few days later I found myself on the same boat as Sir Ronald, homeward bound. We made friends over my story.

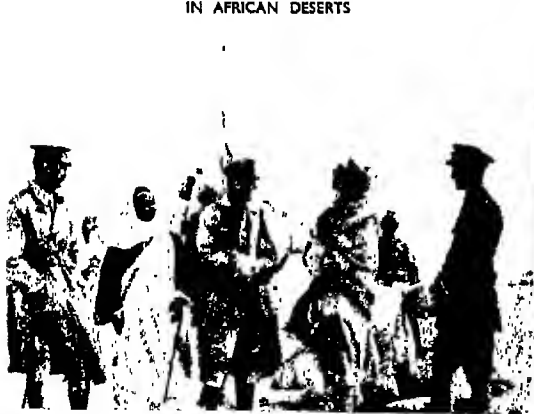
<sup>1</sup> ‘Kibla’, religious newspaper in Mecca.

<sup>2</sup> Steward of the Pilgrimage.



The Sitt Khadija on her Kufra journey. 1. On donkey. 2. With group of Bedouin. 3. With Western Desert Camel Corps—officers (left to right) Col. Forth, Gen. Hunter, Maj. de Halpern. 4. On camel. 5. Praying. 6. At door of Arab house

#### IN AFRICAN DESERTS



KHADIJA, DAUGHTER OF  
ABDULLAH FAHMI



Rosita Forbes in the harem dress  
of Asir



Hay Wrightson

The peasant dress  
of Yemen, Western  
Arabia

## CHAPTER IX

1921

### *Marriage and Much Else*

ON MY WEDDING MORNING, I again refused to marry Arthur McGrath. It made no difference. He is a very determined man—when he happens to want anything. Unfortunately, his wants are few. He has no ambition. He is totally uninterested in possessions and careless of surroundings. He likes his own way, his own habits and his own particular friends. People mean more to him than places.

We were married at the Chapel Royal, and as I had decided that Rosita 'Forbes' must end I wore black. It was a silly gesture, but it amused me at the time—for part of me resolutely refuses to grow up. I looked my best in black, so why not wear it? I went to the length of having a black wedding-ring, but all this was intended to be a private joke. Instead, there were headlines in two continents, and when—later that winter—I lectured about North Africa and the Middle East, reporters were far more interested in the quite ordinary black dress I had worn for what was supposed to be the quietest of weddings, than in the Arabs. This caused me much heart-searching and I began to suspect myself of charlatanism.

At that time life was bewildering me more than usual. For it swung between extremes of criticism and adulation. Neither was merited. Looking back—from the peak of war years, with nations struggling for their souls as well as their existence—it is amazing to recollect the hysterical publicity given to such incidents as the climbing of Everest, the first crossing of the Libyan desert, a speed test or a long distance flight. It was an era of unbalanced personality-worship, and in the case of a woman it was reduced to humiliating sentimentality. I remember a charming reporter—in London—writing that I could not possibly have got to Kufra without curly hair! Mine being completely straight when left alone was just sufficient to turn ignominy into amusement. An equally delightful journalist in U.S.A., foiled of an interview, wrote a column about my supposed character, deduced from the fact that I used a rubber tooth-brush. No wonder that I wanted the dissolution of Rosita Forbes in favour of Mrs. McGrath.

With two sighs of relief, we started on our honeymoon. As the boat neared the quay at Ostend, we saw a number of people with flowers. One of the bouquets was as large as a well-grown child. "It must be a funeral," said Arthur. "They all look very gay," I suggested. "A wedding then." Suspicion turned to dismay. "You don't think it's ours——" I began.

Arthur looked at me with kindly disapproval. He evidently saw signs of swollen head. "I don't think you need exaggerate the perils of our state!" he laughed. But I was right. Eminent citizens in tall hats, children with posies, the equivalent of an English borough council with an address of welcome, and representatives of the famous Belgian Geographical Societies met us on the quay.

We began our married life with speeches. We continued it in an atmosphere of bouquets and public meetings. For a week we never dined less than twenty. In French we both of us returned heartfelt and despairing thanks. I do not remember going to bed at all.

By the time the Antwerp Geographical Society accorded me their gold medal, *en pleine séance*, I was on edge—indeed on so many edges that I nearly came to pieces.

I felt brittle and did not want to be touched. I saw my marriage and my life getting hopelessly muddled just when I thought the first would be the solution of the second.

We escaped to the Ardennes for a few days, but it was cold and wet. So we made delightful plans for a visit to Brussels, where we knew nobody. We would lose ourselves in an enormous hotel, eat prodigiously—*car l'appétit vient en aimant*—see some pictures, dance a little, be at last happy. On our arrival in the capital, we were immediately informed of the British Ambassador's hospitable intentions. "We couldn't get hold of you before—the Belgians were too thick round you. But you must dine to-night and then——". So it went on. Rosita 'Forbes' did not die, but she became my most intimate enemy. By her, eventually, I was defeated.

Some time that winter we went to Paris. The French Geographical Society gave me their gold medal and I made an hour's speech—in French—at the Sorbonne University. Terror was added to the occasion by the information that only one other woman had previously been accorded this honour. She was the celebrated Mme. Curie, discoverer of radium. What noble footsteps to follow and how unworthy I felt!

Cold with fright, I clutched my husband's hand all the way to the Sorbonne. My own was stiff. I felt the fingers did not belong to me. On the platform, with General Gouraud, then Governor of Paris, and the Garde Républicaine in front of me, with eminent scientists looking exactly what they were and representatives of the Embassies preparing to be bored, I held on to an enormous standing lamp thinking it was attached to the floor. It was not. When it shook in my grip, I thought the whole world was reeling.

Somehow I got through that speech—and the reception which followed. General Gouraud brushed my cheeks with his lips as he congratulated me on the geographical honour. "Ma chère *Ennemie*," he said with a twinkle, "je vous salue au nom de la France."

He was right. The irony would have amused me had I not been so alarmed. For in Beyrout, in 1920, the General had constantly in-

vited me to dinner, knowing that—while we argued about Arab politics and possibilities—his Chief of Police, Robert le Caix, was going through my papers. Like Benito Mussolini, French officialdom believed in love—as the first necessity for the happiness of any young woman. That a personable girl should wander foot-loose in the locust-ridden plains of Hauran, or among the rebel Druses in their mountains, rather than allow good-looking officers in the towns to ‘make her the court’, was past their comprehension. There must be a sinister purpose—and money—in my madness. For the French, with their thrifty sense and their rigid logic—both so destructive to understanding—there is always money ‘at the bottom’. It is sometimes a surprisingly small sum.

So the clever and ingenious le Caix *fouillait dans mes malles* which suggests the uttermost thoroughness of search, but he was betrayed by a hair. Everything else was meticulously replaced, while General Gouraud, whose principles and courage I greatly admired, entertained me with a sophistry our soldiers rarely achieve. But the hairs which I had laid—so casually—where they might have fallen, were overlooked. I always knew what had happened to my belongings when I found my hairs displaced.

The notes I had made for General Newman, which I subsequently delivered in Cairo, were invariably upon my person. I am sure it gave me much pleasure to feel them—squashed and uncomfortable—under my suspender-belt. The witty General’s “My dear enemy” was the beginning of the second round in our friendship. It added to my appreciation of his undoubted qualities. I think if the Emir Feisul and he had been left alone together they might have come to satisfactory terms for Syria and for France. But a number of Governments interfered.

In London, Arthur and I settled down in an attractive and inconvenient maisonette, where each room opened out of another, so that the place was born of a passage out of a Chinese puzzle. The result was much as those nests of boxes, one inside the other. I still think that the kitchen could only be reached through Arthur’s bedroom and the dining-room by way of a bath, but I may be wrong.

At that time we had few suitable and persistent friends. Mine were scattered all over the earth or solidly established in vast and impoverished Lincolnshire houses. My husband’s were in the army, anywhere about England and the Empire. Elderly London society was very kind to us. We were, I confess, bored at numbers of very long and very dull dinners. At one of them a dowager with an amusing tongue gave my husband brief biographies of the guests, ending with “And that woman in green, down the table—that’s Rosita Forbes. I believe she——”

“MY WIFE,” interposed Arthur hurriedly and in capital letters. He missed a good many such opportunities. They were recurrent.

In those first months of London, I was still puzzled by the extremes of recognition accorded to what I had considered an adventure of the spirit as well as the flesh. I was a great deal hurt—as well as flattered. When I left Africa, a famous Pro-Consul,<sup>1</sup> for whose opinion I had the most profound respect, wrote me a letter paying gracious tribute to a journey which he described as ‘service to the Empire’. I had never met this able and well-informed administrator, which made his praise impersonal—and therefore the more welcome. One day Arthur was sunk in a deep armchair in his club. Behind him, unaware of his presence, two men were discussing my journey to Kufra. A young officer said something like “That was a terrific achievement——” “Yes,” said the voice of the famous Pro-Consul, “but I imagine the Egyptian with her must have got his *quid pro quo*——” and so on. Up rose six foot four of Arthur McGrath. He must have seemed unending to the startled gossip. “You are talking about my wife——” he began. The Pro-Consul waited for no more.

Arthur told me of the episode, because he regarded it as sufficiently ridiculous to be amusing. But *I* was still too near that desert journey. The sweat, smell and dirt of it were clear in my mind. With such limited water, we had not been able to wash. Our skins were horrible, pitted by sand-storm, flayed by sun and wind. The publicity with which *every* action—and physical function—was of necessity attended, in flat desert without even a blade of grass as shelter, must have been known to the experienced Pro-Consul. Exhausted men fell down at the end of the day’s march. Their feet were often bleeding, their eyes swollen, their gums raw from need of water. If we could sleep in the bitter cold of the nights, if we could endure through the blistering heat of noon, if we could bear the stench of each other’s unwashed, lice-ridden flesh over the communal rice, always thick with sand, it was all we asked. The great man intended no more than an intriguing phrase—which he knew untrue—but it hurt me for years. When, not long ago, we were introduced by the Duke of Gloucester after a charity entertainment, I asked the Pro-Consul what he meant by such idle gossip. With generosity and courage—for it cannot have been a pleasant moment—he replied, “Nothing at all. I have often deeply regretted it.” I had waited seventeen years for that acknowledgement. It restored my respect for a great administrator.

I think the truth of the matter was that too much fuss had been made over my Kufra journey. It had caught the people’s imagination—and held it for altogether too long. I was aware of this, but could not help it. It happened to be the first expedition of its kind. And in that ill-balanced decade, the popular press behaved as if ‘woman’ was in herself a prodigy and anything she contrived to do, however unimportant, a symptom of evolution. Men naturally bristled and—

<sup>1</sup> Not Lord Allenby, who was a great supporter and friend of mine, and wrote the preface to my *Red Sea to Blue Nile*.

indignant at such lack of proportion—attacked me instead of the sickly sentimentality of which I was a victim as well as a consciously synthetic idol.

Lord Edward Gleichen burst into print with the totally erroneous statement that Hassanein Bey, to whose persuasive eloquence we owed on endless occasions either our lives or our success, without whom, of course, I should never have been able to force that expedition through to Kufra, had made only the compass traverse. This was too much. For the invaluable Hassanein Bey had been far too occupied with other duties to keep one at all. Lord Edward was summoned to our toy dwelling. Confronted with the sole traverse in all its stages of evolution—in my writing—from the daily pencil notes in my copy-book to the surveys I worked out with the help of the geographer, Mr. Ball, in Cairo, Lord Edward was obliged to apologize. With ill grace, he published in *The Times* the least possible retraction he could contrive. It was altogether a very poor show. This masculine attitude I could not understand. For women can do so little in relation to men's achievements, and what they do in exploration is fractional when compared with the mapping of the globe. Sir Percy Sykes's famous *History of Exploration*—encyclopaedia of its subject—mentions only three women among the hundreds of men who have discovered the known world. So there can be no room for jealousy.

I was hurt and also puzzled. For the Torr reserve and shyness were part of my being. Fundamentally, they are my gaolers. I can never escape them. So I shall never really be a success. For I always have to force self-expression. Then it becomes clumsy and unnatural. Also, with driving will behind, it goes on occasions too far, discomfiting other people and making me painfully ashamed of myself. But I do not think this tortured determination would have been necessary had the world of 1920-22 accepted the Kufra journey as a good adventure and a pleasantly moderate achievement, instead of distorting it by extremes of carping or of praise.

All this time, I was trying to yoke married life with a public career. This, for a woman, is always difficult. It is much better, I am sure, to act as producer to whatever part a husband chooses to play. Of course, it may be different now. I do not know. With all women at work, for the duration of the war, perhaps marriage can be compressed into more reasonable limits. For me, it was too big. I had been brought up to believe it the most important thing in life. And that Lincolnshire squirage upbringing is a mould. It forms and limits and definitely marks a character.

Still I worked for Arab unity and independence, writing, speaking and learning more about Moslem conditions and leaders by travel—from Morocco to the forbidden land of Asir, from the new capital of Angora to the borders of Afghanistan. Simultaneously I strove for a personal relationship which would satisfy my exaggerated spiritual



loneliness and buttress love with friendship. I think this would always be difficult of achievement between two people so different and so constantly separated. Laughingly, we told each other, "Marriage must be sufficiently ventilated"; but I suspect I went away too much. Ventilation became a draught.

Arthur was a far better soldier than I was—or am—a writer. He has a canalized but excellent brain, trained and disciplined. Mine is quicker, but far less reasonable. I have no talent for anything—except perhaps the speech which I inherited as a gift from my father. My wits are superficial. In order to write anything at all, I have to know ten times as much. This is the antithesis of popular journalism, but fitting for international comment. At one time, I knew enough about peoples, events and the undercurrents of politics in Europe, Africa or the Middle East, and I was sufficiently intimate with leaders of thought—black or grey, red, white or delicately pink—to have made a good foreign correspondent. But it was before the splendid days of Dorothy Thompson and Virginia Cowle.

When Bartlett of the *Daily Telegraph* died, I went to see Colonel Lawson. He was then financial manager of that eminent paper. For twenty years it has chronicled my journeys. Generously it subsidized one of my few undiluted successes—in Abyssinia—and among other more agreeable happenings, it lost money over St. John Philby's and my failure to take a joint expedition across the Rub al Khali. General Lawson, subsequently Director of Public Relations at the War Office, was always a friend of mine and he helped me a great deal. I am not at all sure that he would not—in another dimension—have employed me as a successor to the elderly and experienced Bartlett. But it was in England, with the columnists writing about 'woman' as if she were a miracle which had never happened before, and business men determined to keep her in her place, at a typewriter or in the kitchen. "As long as you look like that," ruminated Fred Lawson, "you haven't a chance to be taken seriously. Grey hair would be an improvement. Well, now, how soon do you think you can go grey?"

I laughed and was inwardly furious. I remembered Arthur Hinks of the R.G.S. regarding me with some dismay and ordering me to wear black so that I would look older and more in keeping with his august platform. Of malice aforethought, I complied. The result—from the Place Vendôme—was not what he expected.

It is, I think, greatly to my husband's credit that he does not abhor me. For I have been no comfort at all as a wife. We have had a lot of good times together. We have shared a lot of personal disasters. The travel writings of Rosita Forbes have—on occasions—opened countries, houses and hearts to us. At others, they have given us unrelenting enemies who, most illogically, extended their persecution to my husband. How far this has disturbed him I do not know. He is a remarkable character and I admire him enormously. If he had

married anyone else, he would, I feel, have been much more materially successful. But my job was the more publicized and its rewards the greater—in the way of free travel, of somewhat overwhelming personal and political contacts, and of enchanting hospitality from one end of the world to another. So gradually and quite wrongly, both of us sacrificed too much to it.

Arthur is the most Irish Irishman I know. He is completely Celt, with the unbounded charm of his race and a dangerous facility for making friends. Life has been at once too easy and too hard for him. It is no small achievement that he continues on good terms with it. This he has achieved without loss of principle or of reasonable faith. He has kept the affection of everyone who knows him and evolved a satisfactory philosophy. This apparently not only enables him to endure the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but to make admirable use of them as arms captured from the enemy.

I believe he still loves me. He dislikes me—very sensibly—at times. At others, he admires me more than I deserve. He has always "helped and supported" me to the best of his ability. And he is so much the best thing in my life—the "stuff of which dreams are made"—that I can comprehend the heartfelt cry of the then Prince Edward in his last speech before he left England. Many people disliked that broadcast. It revolted Anglo-Saxons who cannot express their feelings and are embarrassed by such expression in others. With all my friends, to whom the British Commonwealth is the most important and the most valuable achievement of two centuries, I deplore the desertion of an empire for a woman beloved. Yet I have been so constantly and so desperately lonely that I could well understand the Prince's pathetic conviction that he could no longer endure "without the help and support" of one person. In the case of a King, this one person must surely be a wife. For to whom else can a sovereign talk without fear or doubt. The most poignant expression of 'Victoria Regina', symbol and essence of royalty, was in the words—uttered after the death of the Prince Consort—"Now there will be nobody to call me 'Vicki'."

It seems to me essential for personal happiness that one should be able to talk openly and truly with some other human being. Love, passion, physical fidelity are often, it seems to me, far less important than an intimate understanding which would allow the expression—and with discussion, the just measurement—of ideas, doubts and perplexities, of feelings and aspirations. For these are the raw material in light and shadow, out of which comes the substance of our lives. Speech is, above all else, the gift which the most troubled generation in history—the "so few" who in an international sense have been called to save "so many"—have received as compensation for their disillusionment. The young of to-day know what is happening to them. Words are their tools. With remarkable clarity of perception, they are able to divide what they see from what they think and feel.

Hilary's *Last Enemy* and Squadron Leader Simpson's *One of our Pilots is Safe* are exemplary in their power of self-expression. In the latter, the author tells how—with the metal of his belt melting into his body and his hands on fire—he cannot extricate himself from the blazing cockpit. Forced to watch as well as to feel his body burn, his mind records three dimensional sensation and he can put the whole experience into words. I do not believe anybody of my generation could have achieved this. We were not trained to think in such terms. Reality—inside ourselves—embarrassed us. We were as muddled and mysterious as a haggis—or the best Arab cous-cous. To-day, men and girls, if they can think at all, appear to do so without the pretences, prejudices and pre-conceptions familiar to the post 1918 generation. They are ashamed of nothing—not even of being brave. So, if they make the mistakes we did after the last war, they will have to stand up to them and suffer, without the feeling of being scarecrows. In 1944 men and women are no longer turned into guys by outworn habiliments of thought. They have chosen their own nakedness. It is mentally provocative but also utilitarian.

## CHAPTER X

1922

### *The Sitt Khadija in Western Arabia*

IN 1922 I went to Western Arabia. In Libya, while I travelled among the Senussi, I had heard a great deal about the affiliated Idrisi tariq, which word, literally interpreted, means a 'path', i.e. a way of thinking. Their headquarters were at Sabya, in the Yemen. It was unknown to Europe or America, and there was nothing very exciting to know, for Sabya was then just a collection of reed huts called 'aresb', built round the mud-walled palace of the Emir. Above this primitive capital rose two small hills which were supposed to contain emeralds.

I wanted to travel through the forbidden lands—Asir and Yemen—into Nejd, but in this last purpose I did not succeed. From the beginning, the journey was singularly exasperating. I can remember no moments of that rich, reflective peace which is the 'barraka'—the blessing—of desert travel.

Far too much happened to us—all of it unpleasant. At Port Sudan, I made friends with the harbour master, Captain Higgs. He most kindly threw himself into the spirit of the enterprise, so that, after many delays and misadventures, a 'raïs'<sup>1</sup> was discovered who said that, forty years ago he had crossed the Red Sea to Jizan on the Arabian

<sup>1</sup> 'Raïs', captain.

shore. The old man was willing to try again, but he had difficulty in getting a crew. His sambukh,<sup>1</sup> the *Khadra*, was patched and unseaworthy. The seams had been split on the reef and caulked. She smelled of every cargo she had carried.

In secrecy, preparations were made—for the British Government allowed no venturing off the edge of the known and safe map. All my life I have been in arms against the Lion's housekeeperly determination to prevent unofficial information creeping in among the labels in its store cupboards. All my life I have been running away from the royal beast's governess and grandmother habits. For no life matters in comparison with knowledge. To venture in peace is as much the privilege of the citizen—if he belongs to 'no mean country'—as the right divine of death in war. But no British official agrees on this subject. In season and out of season, I was told, "You cannot go! It is impossible." "Yes, I see—of course," I agreed, and went.

Occasionally a pro-consul with a sense of humour said something like, "Well, take wood for your coffin with you. It is expensive in Yunan," or, upon my return, "I wasn't altogether disturbed, for, in spite of your care, I guessed you were going a very long way. You have given my officers a lot of exercise—running after you. That is good for them. So I forgive you."

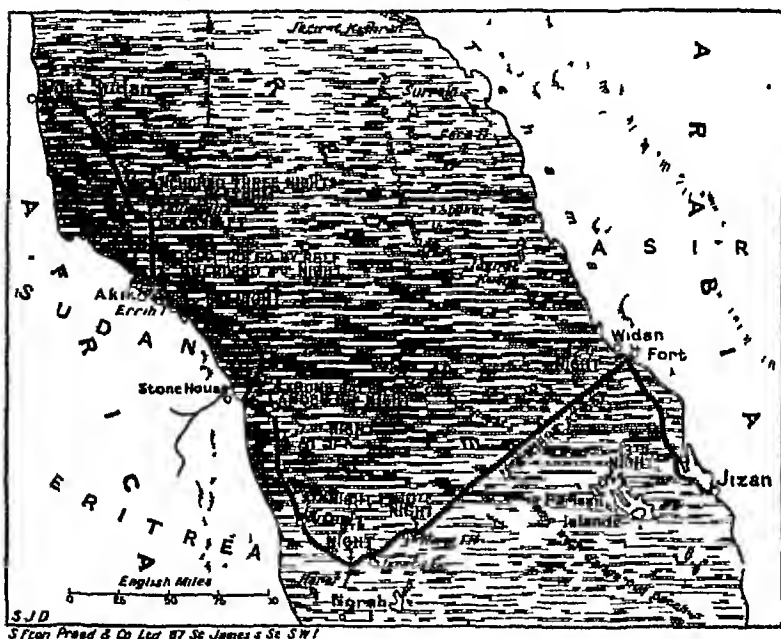
But in Port Sudan we worked in Cimmerian dark. The old sambukh was cleared and provisioned. A week's water was put on board. The crew of eight, recruited with difficulty and heavily bribed, consisted of Arabs escaping from the just consequences of their ill deeds. Two were murderers. Even the imaginative and indomitable Captain Higgs could not get me ballast. This was officially issued—with sailing papers.

But the Arabian coast was no legitimate goal.

Secretly, at dead of night, I crept on board, and the old *Khadra*, creaking like a mill-wheel, slid unnoticed out of harbour. That was the last quiet thing she did for a fortnight. Law and nationality I had left behind at Port Sudan. The *Khadra* left discretion. For no fortune would I repeat those fourteen days. The temperature was 92 Fahrenheit. The Azieb blew unceasingly—and with gale force from the south. As the crow flies it is three hundred and fifty miles to Jizan, port of forbidden Asir. But, with the wind dead against us, we had to tack back and forth along the African shore, hugging such shelter as it afforded, averaging only a few miles on the worst days. At night, we ventured within the reef, scraping at times over cragged coral to anchor off some islet. Once I slept ashore, on sand porous as a sponge. The crew were against it, but I did not understand their reiterated warning of 'bish-bish'. In the middle of the night I woke and found nightmare translated into reality. The earth was alive and legged, or my flesh had disintegrated and in separate atoms was

<sup>1</sup> 'Sambukh', sailing craft.

scuffling all over the place. For the first horrific moment, I was not sure. Then—in starlight—I saw the sand procreate and movement take shape. The islet had raised itself on countless legs. While I stumbled towards the water, shouting for help, from every hole poured a constant stream of crabs. Regular as water out of taps, they came. The crew, realizing what would happen, had wisely returned to the sambukh. In a 'huri', which is a log canoe—shaped to fit a man's hips, close as a beetle shell—one of the murderers paddled towards me. His long knife never left him, nor did his good temper. "I told you bish-bish," he reproved me. "See, there they are."



THE VOYAGE TO JIZAN

After many days of buffeting and turmoil, with the *Khadra* dancing like a bobbin in a water-spout, we had beaten our way sufficiently far south. Drenched, we saw what might be the Haimil Islands. So we wore out, with filling sails, towards the open sea. The eleventh night took us right across on a north-easterly bearing. Without cargo or ballast, the *Khadra* skidded at breaker-height in the most extraordinary variety of movements. It took three men to hold the tiller. Each minute I thought the sail would split. When dawn came, a strange dhow bore down on us. Her intentions were evidently of the worst. When it was clear that she intended to put us under, we shot the steersman, emptied our rifles among the crew and escaped by skimming over the reef—impassable to a loaded craft. The slaver could not follow.

Sunrise turned the Arabian coast into precious material. Like the stones from Joshua's breastplate, the hills rose against jewelled clarity of sky. But we had no time for beauty. We were within the range of the Dhuwi Barakat, the tribe which in the last war sold into bondage or ham-strung the survivors of the *Emden*. Something had gone very wrong with my navigation. We were a hundred and fifty miles too far north.

Desperately we tacked south again, keeping within the reef and fearful every moment of tearing our hull on the rocks. It was still very rough. Like an unbroken stallion, the *Khadra* reared against the swell. I thought she must go over backwards. But down she crashed, swinging as if rudderless in a succession of heaving circles. Waves broke over us and we baled for our lives. As the sambukh filled, the movement was less appalling. Bruised, torn, we made sure that our rifles, lashed to the mast, were still dry. I had knocked my head against something and blood would run into one eye. For ten days, I had been sick without remission. Between spasms, I navigated with the aid of the *Red Sea Pilot*, some local charts which omitted a deal of reef and an oil compass—the Raïs's treasure which he believed infallible.

I fought my own physical weakness, due to thirst, as the water gradually gave out, and an aching emptiness of hunger, for I could keep nothing inside me. I fought mutiny among the crew and their superstitions—concerned with whales and devils by day, ghosts with false stars in their foreheads by night. I fought the storm which carried away more than the *Khadra* could spare and the vagaries of the old-fashioned compass. I was distraught by my own ignorance and by the strong current off the Farisan Isles which had swept us so far out of our course. I had to cope with the habits of the old patched tub, long unseaworthy, her history of interdependent stench, the scurrying mess of cockroaches and the refuse swilling in bilge-water.

Then, one morning suddenly, for no reason, it was calm. The amiable murderer offered me semi-salt water and a fragment of pink soap. He added a piece of Jonah's fish—or so it seemed, for the united efforts of the crew had caught and dragged on board a vast, unsavoury sea-creature. It was greasy, with a coarse black skin and outrageous teeth.

"Had I your belly," said the second assassin, "I would throw myself into the sea."

Mutely, I crawled under a piece of canvas. Feebly, with long pauses, I brushed and washed and arranged myself. "Wallahi, you must have been pleasant 'min zama-an'—a long time ago—when you were young," remarked the old Raïs kindly.

"I am young," I retorted crossly.

"Allah forbid!" exclaimed the Arab, shocked.

We arrived at Jizan. After much parleying, I was lodged in a house belonging to the Emir. The smooth, small-boned Arab women, yellow

pale from drugs—hardly human they were, so soft and brittle and wrapped in swaddling silks—expected me to die. In three days I recovered.

Sabya, the sacred capital, was only two days' donkey ride. How I hate those small, scuttling, mouse-like meek creatures which the townsmen of Asir use as extra pairs of legs. They rarely employ their own. The donkeys which uncomplainingly bore me—at ridiculous cockroach gaits—over the flat Tehama, were so trifling in size, that my feet swept the sparse vegetation. I kept them hunched up to save my beautiful yellow shoes.

Fifty horsemen, riding stallions of the famous Nejd breed, accompanied us to Sabya. The old town of reed and mud huts held then about twenty thousand people. In the new town, the Emir who never showed his face to his people, was completing a big stone palace, surrounded by the discreet blind houses of his ministers and the chief merchants. Sabya was secretive. Little happened in the streets.

The Idrisi was then known as the hermit of Arabia. He shut himself up for months within his own courts, although state business could only be done in the 'liwan'<sup>1</sup> with the council of advisers.

Disinterested, just, sincere, fabulously generous, the Emir was a strange, detached figure in the whirlpool of contemporary Arab politics. He was tall and dignified, but not of the great stature mental or physical of the incomparable Ibn Saud. He had considerable reputation among the Bedouin who said, "Allah always helps the Imam."

In Western Arabia, where Italy was already intriguing with Imam Yehya of Yemen, where the vast Rub al Khali deserts were yet uncrossed, and the influence of Nejd had not reached its fullest extent, he was considered a peace-maker. At that time he held the balance between King Hussein of the Hedjaz, whose star was setting, and the rising beacon of Ibn Saud, while advising Imam Yehya that the British in Aden would not agree to the spread of Italian influence east of the Red Sea.

The Idrisi appreciated our administration, although he would not allow a foreigner or a Christian in Sabya. Women do not count as either. They take the shape and colour of the clothes they wear. Mine were at that time Egyptian. Under the Cairene 'habbara' and veil, my identity—and many of my ideas—were lost. "At heart," said the Emir of Asir, "the English are honest. Their mistakes are very many and persistent. They are intended to be small things, but they grow like the thorn trees on the Tehama. That is because the soil in which they are planted is good—too good."

I thought the parable apposite. We talked politics. But the events of those days are scarcely incidents in perspective. Of the great men—rebels or patriots—then threatening the peace of Arabia or the dis-

<sup>1</sup> Council chamber.

traught intentions of Britain and France, only Ibn Saud remains—in full and growing power. Hussein of Mecca is dead. So are King Feisul and his only son. The fanatical Mufti of Jerusalem, clever and bitter politician, who plotted with Germany to win the freedom of Arab Palestine at the expense of Britain and Zion, is in exile. Rashid Ali, his ally, once Prime Minister of Iraq, who planned with Nazi money the honeycomb organization which was to facilitate German invasion, shuttles now between Berlin, Athens and Rome. How far, I wonder, has his mysterious ‘Golden Square’ been suppressed—or does it still work in secret for the ‘Moslem unity and independence’ promised *now* by Hitler?

The Idrisi Emir presented me with a handful of pearls wrapped in gold-embroidered silk. He would not help me to go into Nejd as I wanted, but he sent his ‘wakil’ with me on a journey through the plains of the Tehama which ended at Hodeidah. This ‘steward of the palace’ was called Jusuf. He was a townsman, plump, smooth-skinned and soft. He wore fine silks and carried no weapons. His courage was that of a mouse, and he told me at once, “Travelling is of all things most unsuitable for women.” Poor Jusuf, he tired far quicker than I did. He was the butt of the keen, hard-faced desert men who drove—in one of the two Fords which the Emirate possessed—or rode with us. He was full of fears and doubts, most of them justified. For every possible disaster happened to us, but reduced in size and effect. Fate was armed with pins instead of arrows.

It was really a very irritating journey, and if Jusuf had been a better manager I do not think we need have become involved in so many difficulties. Most of them were extraneous to our circumstances and purposes.

I was supposed to be an Egyptian woman destined for a chieftain’s harem in some distant place whose name changed, of course, as we travelled.

In Midi, a fairly large town, receiving centre of the slave-trade which supplied eunuchs, concubines and serving-girls to the harems of merchants and religious leaders all over Arabia, I was nearly murdered by a crowd which suddenly developed religious hysteria. At that time we were all riding. Our mounts were the small, nervous stallions, light-footed as cats, with ears curved on the inner side into the half-moon sacred to Islam. Thus horses, as well as riders, were entitled to respect. ‘True-believers’ liked to think the animals they bestrode were as ‘different to those others’—the infidels—as they themselves, the chosen of Allah.

On my excitable small steed, I was swept away by the curiosity of the crowd. Hillmen in dark blue, with skins across their shoulders, sellers and buyers from the market, pressed closely round me, separating me from the others. Somebody cried, “She is different.” Others voiced doubt, “Is she of the faithful?” “No, no,” came the swift,



expected and always fearful answer. "She is an infidel! She is not of the seed of Adam!"

In the thronged markets I was pressed back and forth, dragged at last from my horse, crushed into a great doorway while the crowd hesitated. Like the murmur of a rising tide came the dreaded "Zoh! Zoh!" The crazy repetition of the syllable, the head thrown back and forth as if it were loose on the neck, produces a form of self-hypnotism. Under its spell—unwitting perhaps—a crowd will act with mass mind. It is not, I think, responsible for the horrible things it does.

In a minute or two I should be torn and trodden. What would be left of me might be mopped up on blotting-paper. So I thought, feeling sick and furious. But the door behind me opened and I was dragged into a merchant's house. "Wallahi, she is strange!" exclaimed the voices of my saviours.

"There are thousands like me in Egypt," I protested.

Hands pushed me upstairs. I stumbled over my torn clothes. Voices shouted, "Shut the door! Shut the door."

The sons of the house and its slaves forced the heavy bars into place. "Sit now, in peace," came whispering slow tones. And, in an upper room, for the first time I saw the type familiar in old Persian missals. There were twenty or more women and girls, pale, with oval faces, heavy-lidded and smooth-skinned. Their mouths had such full lower lips that they seemed swollen. Their eyes were fine and very long, but expressionless, except for a certain vacant sensuality. Their glossy, black hair shone like the most expensive silk. Their breasts were high and splendid, their hips so heavy that 'they incommoded the walk'—as in the ancient Arab tales.

When I had ceased to pant and when my clothes had been somewhat restored, we talked about Egypt. "Is it true," asked Zahra and Aysha, daughters of the house, "that your lords are so cruel that they force you to walk in the streets?"

I tried to explain the 'modernity' of Cairo, where some young wives—even in 1922—met their husband's friends unveiled, under the marital eye.

The sheltered, soft women of Yemen were appalled. "I was born in this room," said Zahra, "and I shall never leave it till my father gives me to a husband. Women should be taken care of and provided with all they desire, but what use to them is freedom? They would then be unwanted."

Silence followed her words. The harem needed time in which to consider their full purport. Dismay washed the blank, smooth faces. 'Unwanted' was a terrible word applied to women. Years later I heard Michael Arlen—with whom I was debating 'equality' of sex, upon a London platform—couple the same grim word with 'freedom'. "For if a woman is free," he said, "it is only because no man has cared enough to hold her."

## CHAPTER XI

1922

### *Adventures—Some in Trans-Jordan*

THE PEOPLE OF YEMEN time their day by Kat. They go mad without it. By it their health is ruined. They die young. The drug comes from a plant which grows in the Arabian hills. A service of fast-trotting camels brings the fresh, green leaves to the markets on the plains. There the crowds gather, waiting for vitality or wit. It comes to them as they chew the bitter foliage. With kat, they achieve a few hours of spurious energy, so that the pace of a journey has to be measured by the effect and duration of the drug. Bliss gives way to inertia, and if a miscalculation has been made, all the townsmen in the party will sink prostrate, wherever they happen to be. No further effort can be asked of them. They must sleep off the dull misery in which the kat eater loses all power of thought or action. Waking brings intense irritability. It is during this third stage, that tempers flare, irreparable quarrels develop—without any reason—and murders are committed. It is unfortunate that in the Yemen only Jews, barbers, and women travel unarmed. They are safe—except from unthinking fanaticism. Other citizens, hillmen or nomads, carry the 'jembiah', which is a curved dagger. When the delivery of kat is delayed, they are apt to use these weapons on the nearest available bodies.

In one of the Hashabiri villages, we found ourselves, most unwillingly, in the middle of a kat riot. It was as if a criminal asylum had been emptied of its lunatics. That morning, the supply of leaves had not arrived from the mountains. Crowds waited in the market square. With glazed eyes and foam dripping from their mouths, the great men—merchants, sheikhs and religious leaders—stood stiff and tense, staring towards the hills. The lesser people cried and howled, incoherent as animals. Some wretched middle-men, suspected of tampering with the camel service for their own profit, were seized and trodden out of shape. One disappeared altogether as if his body had dissolved. The other was rescued by fighting slaves who were themselves attacked. Then the chaotic mass, too crazy to think, swarmed up to the 'mamuria'. This seat of local government had been barred and barricaded. From an upper window, the Mamur looked down at the crowd. Yells rose. "Put the dog in prison, honoured Lord!" "He would kill us! He would torture us!" "He has stopped our kat. We cannot live." "Give the dog to us."

What remained of the wretched middleman had been thrust out of sight. But the shouts continued until a new rumour spread—a trotting camel had been seen far away.

Immediately the crowd turned and ran. Ashraf<sup>1</sup> trailed silk robes in the dust. Their huge, golden daggers bumped against protruding stomachs. Sweat poured down their faces. Turbans slipped and fell. Poor men, with their torn clothes streaming unheeded, eunuchs bulging out of their rich silks, carriers with swollen muscles forcing a way with brutal indifference, merchants—weedy and yellow-skinned in brilliant saffron—all pushed and struggled into the suq.<sup>2</sup> There, pressed against a mud wall, with Jusuf murmuring prayers and protestations, I watched demented battle.

An over-ridden camel was rolling, apparently in its death-throes. Its load never reached the booth which was its official destination. The crowd broke over the hillman who had brought the kat. His dark blue hand-woven cotton and his jackal skins disappeared. I did not see him again.

A beggar caught my stirrup and shrieked at me to give him a few leaves. . . . "Allah bless you—there is no generosity like that of kat." He was diseased and half blind. By the time I could extricate myself from his grip, the crowd had got hold of the sacks and emptied them. The waves of sound changed tone. "Allah is great! Blesséd be Allah!"

Out of the throng came an unrecognizable figure. Blood-stained and torn, it reeled against the wall beside us. In one hand it clutched some leaves. A gash rent its chest. "Allah is generous!" whispered the dry lips. The muscles of the bruised hand relaxed. The body crumpled as if it were without substance, and as it fell the leaves dropped, unheeded.

"Allah save us, it is the Imam of the Mosque," exclaimed Jusuf. His voice was hardly audible. With a wrench, he dragged his horse round. It reared and I saw blood on the hoofs. "Come—come, let us escape from this madness," begged the Emir's wakil. With his purple silks bellling as sails in the wind—leaning forward in the saddle—he gave his terrified stallion the rein. How he got through—or over—the crowd, absorbed, chewing, on the edge of content, I do not know. We caught up with him some miles outside the town.

Poor Jusuf, how he disliked that journey! He was always fussed and disturbed by the need of rescue. One night, we arrived late in a Bedouin encampment. The reed huts were surrounded by yards fenced with sticks. The women's quarters were crowded. I could not sleep with heads, shoulders and feet pressed against me, a veil smelling of marigolds across my mouth. Cautiously, I slipped out into the moonlight. It was brilliant. Standing in the open and the silence, I thought of a white tide. In it the plains were steeped. I had never seen such light. I thought I could hold it in my hands like water and let it run through my fingers. I could fall back in it and

<sup>1</sup> Ashraf, the plural of Sherif, i.e. religious leaders.

<sup>2</sup> Market.

float, into endless, still peace. Nothing would have persuaded me back into the crowded hut. Slowly I walked across the yard, imagining my feet would make marks on the whiteness of the night.

There was a small hut, standing alone. Into it I peered and saw a girl asleep. Strong, sweet scent came from her garments. She must be a bride, I thought. If it were the first night of the marriage, her husband would have left her early—according to the law of Islam. Winding my 'sheiba'<sup>1</sup> over my bare feet, I lay down at the other side of the hut and slept.

The sun was up when I woke. Voices muttered outside, but nobody crossed the threshold. Hysterically, Jusuf called to me—from a distance. "What has happened?" I asked, repeating the phrase common to that journey. So much was always happening!

"Allah be praised! The devil has not taken her!" Cross, hot, sticky, puzzled, lean and grimed, I came out of the hut. A group of women, unvoiled as is the Bedouin custom, parted in front of me. It was obvious nobody would touch me. From the other side of the paling, Jusuf wailed, "Unclean, unclean—come quickly!"

After some misunderstandings, they made me realize I had been sleeping with a corpse prepared for burial. The sweet scent came from the death-herbs thrust into the breast. There a deep gash had been made to allow the spirit to escape. On to a horse I climbed. Nobody spoke to me. The lanes cleared as I passed, for surely the devil had taken my soul. It was the husk of a woman who rode.

"Hurry, hurry," cried Jusuf, frightened of stones. If a child flung the first, the people would take it as a sign. As a leper I rode, with space growing in front of me and to the sides. Even the Idrisi wakil kept his distance. It took him some days to forget how close I had been to the devil.

In Hamideya, Jusuf had to effect another rescue. Hard-pressed by questions about Egyptian custom and my grey eyes, I asked the hard-faced wife of the Sheikh if I might wash before the evening meal. Nubian slaves, with teeth like seeds in a split pomegranate, rich-fleshed and dusky purple, took me to the bath. It was the usual empty hut, with a hole in one corner through which the water runs away. A barrel had been filled with herb-scented liquid. While I struggled with the first strings, I realized that the amiable blacks were waiting to wash me. My beautiful, brown skin, bought in a bottle, ended somewhere below my shoulder-blades. There was a horrible pause, while the negresses watched me and I could think of nothing whatsoever to do. With stiffening fingers I fumbled among my clothes. They consisted of a dark red silk dress, slit to the waist over a tight-fitting embroidered bodice, a cap rich with embroidery tied at the back of my head and over the whole thing a 'sheiba'—the local sheet-like garment which

<sup>1</sup> The Yemenese version of the Libyan 'barracan', or the Egyptian 'habbara', the Moslem woman's outer garment.

is veil and cloak combined. I had begun the journey in Egyptian dress, but the black 'habbara' and semi-transparent white veil had roused so much curiosity and at times such fanatical frenzy that after I had become involved in several unpleasant scenes—riots in the streets, or quarrels in the harems—I wore the dress of a well-to-do Yemenese. Fortunately, it had a pocket, and in that pocket I kept among other necessities, a piece of soap. It was not difficult to slip this into my mouth and—sucking vigorously—to produce sufficient foam for a good imitation of a fit. Subsequently I was very sick. The slaves forgot about my bath. They fled—screaming that I was possessed of a devil. Jusuf had to explain—through the chink of a door. I was delicate, he said, and subject to fits. It was the will of Allah and a sickness common in Egypt. Once again we left in haste.

Asir and Yemen were still in the days of Abraham. I saw women sold in the court of a merchant's house exactly as if they were expensive racing fillies. On the great plains of the Tchama I lived for awhile in the patriarchal dwelling of a tribal Sheikh. I helped his wives, concubines and daughters to roast whole sheep and stuff them with rice, spices, eggs, chicks and balls of honey. With the Sheikh's favourite, a lovely Circassian bought for the equivalent of £100 in Mecca, I had extraordinary conversations about the pleasures of the flesh. Such women are experts in the arts of passion. They enjoy pain. Suffering is part of the delight they share with the man who owns them. This particular girl used to come exhausted from the Sheikh's room, with marks on her wrists and across her back, to be envied by every other woman in the harem. The family and slaves were not particularly cloistered as is the case with townswomen. They wandered as they chose over the enormous expanses of flat roof on to which the coolest rooms opened. Only the ground floor, most of it stables and barns, was free to men and so forbidden to the three generations of women in the Sheikh's household.

At last, after a succession of narrow escapes, and a pitched battle with a tribe into whose 'range' we had ventured by mistake without a 'rafiq',<sup>1</sup> we reached Hodeidah on the Red Sea north of Aden. There Jusuf thankfully left me. I rented a big, empty room on a roof above a Yemenese merchant's harem. While waiting for a Khedivial steamer to take me back to Egypt, I wrote a book and read the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, borrowed from the delightful Indian Consul.

For weeks I hardly moved out of the immense whitewashed room except to sit upon a carpet spread in the dusk on my roof, or to wash in a shed with a hole in the floor and a barrel of water in the corner. Every evening, after the hours devoted to chewing kat, small boneless women came shyly to visit me. They had exquisite feet, slender, arched and too small for convenient walking.

Sometimes hard-faced, tribal Sheikhs, or weedy, yellow-skinned

<sup>1</sup> 'Rafiq' is, literally, one who answers for you, a person of responsible position.

townsmen blemished by disease came by a back way to see what manner of lunatic I was—for "all women, lacking a man to look after them, must necessarily be without sense".

I bought a long-stemmed water-pipe and sucked it, sitting on my one chair, its legs broken and bound with scarlet cord. I felt self-conscious in the European clothes to which I had returned so that I could talk with men. They were horrified by my appearance—in tweeds and thick shoes. "What charm can a woman have—unveiled?" asked a merchant. "Where there is no mystery, how can there be attraction?"

In Hodeidah, the harem law was strict. Respectable women hardly ever ventured into the streets. Slaves and harlots represented their sex out of doors, and even they were completely hidden under sheibas of night purples and blues. Sometimes they wore primrose yellow leather boots crinkling from ankle to knee. Bells were sewn into the hems of their silk robes, so that they tinkled as they walked.

When I wanted the Qadi to come out with me into the strange, wild town, linking the trades of the sea—pearling, slaving, fishing and gun-running—with the farming and viniculture, the fighting, the pilgrimages, the caravans and the drug markets of the hills, he refused. With emphatic dignity, he explained, "It is not decent that a man should be seen in the street with women."

After weeks of waiting, during which the Indian Consul became a valued friend and I learned a prodigious amount about things beginning with the first six letters of the alphabet, a steamer arrived. Regretfully I gave up the *Encyclopaedia*—I had just arrived at 'flamingo' and found the information surprising. For a whole colony of the birds lived between the house where I lodged and the sea. Their behaviour was altogether different from the description in the learned work of reference. Is it possible that such Biblical omnipotence—in print—should be contradicted by mere birds on a mud flat?

The steamer took me up the Red Sea . . . and the next thing I remember is sitting on sheepskins, leaning against a camel-saddle in the tent of the Emir Abdullah, brother of King Feisul.

His Highness was camped in the Jordan Valley. His state was greater than usual, for he had summoned Nouri Sha-alan, paramount Sheikh of the Ruwalla, to a formal meeting. At that time, Ibn Saud of Nejd permitted his fanatical Wahabis to raid the more settled Northern tribes. Old Nouri, who had sat comfortably on the fence during the last war while his son fought for Britain and his nephew for Turkey, imagined he might be crushed between the Sherifian house of Mecca and the Saudians who owed him for a hundred raids. So, choosing the lesser of two evils, the Chieftain of Ruwalla came as fast as stallions would carry him to make peace with the Emir whose house he had twice betrayed. It was a memorable meeting.

St. John Philby, greatest of Arabian travellers, then Resident of

Trans-Jordan, had driven me down from Jerusalem. His Arabic was perfect and he could put the right twist into his conversation, combining respect with the jokes the Bedouin appreciate. We sat in a great pavilion, strewn with rugs. The flaps were raised so that we looked over the tents and the tethered horses to the hills of Moab. The canvas walls were hung with rifles, embroidered saddle-cloths and swords in tasselled scabbards. Slaves brought great, brass trays piled with sheep, chickens, sheets of thin bread and mountains of rice. We ate with our fingers. Occasionally the Emir tore a succulent morsel from the carcase on the fringed leather mat and gave it to me. "Man must eat to fight and woman that she may be pleasant in his sight," he mocked.

Behind us, the rows of slaves were far more splendid than their masters. They wore silks in bright orange, emerald and rose, with gold-hilted daggers in their belts. The great Bedouin lords, whose word meant life or death among the tribes, were in plain camel's hair with red cotton kufiyas wound over their heads. Abdullah, as a Prince of Mecca, showed a gleam of silk under his dark burnous and his sword-hilt was encrusted with jewels.

For a while the men talked politics. The undercurrents were always the same. What concessions would England make to Zionism? How far could peace be kept between the new Hebrew settlers in Palestine and the dispossessed Arabs who had already wasted the good price they had been paid for their land. Would France succeed in occupying the Druse stronghold on the borders of Syria, or would Ibn Saud back the mountain chieftain Sultan el Atrash? Abdullah put an end to keen and shrewd discussion. "When a man has eaten, his mind is at rest," he said.

I took the hint. "Tell me how you liked London?" I asked. The Emir had spent three months in England, negotiating—successfully—for the independence of Trans-Jordan.

"By Allah! You are all so much in a hurry, you have no time for enjoyment or content," replied His Highness.

I asked what had most impressed him in London and, after pretended reflection, he retorted, "The manners of Lord Curzon and the intelligence of the lift-man at the Carlton—they always knew whether I should go up or down!" It was, I thought, an excellent reply.

I remembered taking the Emir to a film. The Colonial Office had informed me that the subject must be devoid of sex or of political implications. This limited the choice. We decided on Nero. Abdullah was frankly bored—until the scenes in the arena. Then he chuckled and whispered into my ear. Behind us, reporters were ranged. One of them leaned forward to ask, "What did His Highness say?" I hesitated, while Abdullah chose to look blank. His sense of humour must have been satisfied, for what he had said was, "We have many infidels in Trans-Jordan—but alas, no lions."

Re-arranging myself against the silver-tipped camel-saddle, I decided to introduce a difficult remark, given the gathering in the tent above the Dead Sea. "What did you think of European women?" I asked the Emir, who can always be trusted for wit, if not for truth. Nouri Sha-alan was shocked. Never had such a subject been discussed in the tent of a Sherif of Mecca. But Abdullah was possessed by an imp of mischief. He may have been relieved by the opportunity I gave him to postpone his discussion with Nouri. For to an Arab, discourtesy is more disagreeable than lies and it would be difficult to talk of the Ruwalla policy without one or the other.

"Wallahi, your women have no charm," announced the Emir. "They look a man in the eyes and he can at once read what is in their minds."

A good-looking young Sheikh, Ali son of another Hussein of the Sherifian house, came into the tent. His hair was plaited into shining braids, his polished nails were reddened and his eyelids painted with kohl, which provides protection against the desert sun. "Why talk of women, Sidi," he said. "War is more interesting." This young exquisite had been the leader of Feisul's irregular cavalry. The Turks had put a price on his head. He had retorted by such reckless raiding of their lines that they increased it to the biggest reward ever offered for one man.

The Emir would not be turned from his subject. "How can a woman look after a man, if she is always away from his house?" he asked, twinkling at me with shrewd eyes, whose expression he arranged as he chose.

I argued about the habits and the intentions of Western women, while Abdullah's smile grew more malicious. "When a woman goes on a journey it is because a man opens the door for her." He quoted the Arab proverb with an eye on the solid strength of St. John Philby.

At that moment, a woman passed some way from the tent, her indigo wrappings held close across her face. The Arabs looked down. It was an unconscious tribute. Suddenly the Emir thumped his knee. "By Allah!" he exclaimed. "No man shall look upon my sister in my house."

Ali of the slender, painted hands who had killed more men in battle than the legendary elders of his tribe, leaped to his feet. "I would die twenty deaths before a woman of my race should talk with a stranger," he said. Flushed and indignant, the men stared at me. I was a foreigner. It seemed to me my riding-boots were clumsy, my knees and thighs aching as I sat, cross-legged, on skins and carpets in the Arab tent.

Later, Sherif Ali ibn Hussein travelled with St. John Philby and his wife, Bertram Thomas, and me, to Petra, the 'rose red city half as old as time'. "I send him with you," laughed the Emir Abdullah, "so that you may see daily what beauty is like." He added, "If your



husband has no need of you, I will marry you to some young warrior, beautiful as Ali." I thanked him, but said I preferred Arthur.

The Emir feigned surprise. "He is no doubt a great fighter, that husband of yours, but Ali is more pleasant to look on!" He was not outstandingly pleasant to travel with, for—in peace—he liked comfort.

To this, St. John Philby is completely indifferent. I do not know if he has any Irish blood, but in his whole-hearted rebellion against government—whatever its texture—and in his determination to fight, irrespective of cause, he shows a Celtic spirit. In Amma-an, we planned a comfortable journey to Petra, which was not then familiar to tourists. The Wilad Ali, a disagreeable tribe, had closed the Sirhan Valley and were levying toll on caravans. The Resident intended to put a stop to this. His wife, who amazingly combines tolerance, patience and swift, effective activity, wanted to see the outpost of Rome on the desert's edge, which had been a trading post of Nabataean Arabs. So did I.

Bertram Thomas, assistant Resident, I think, was already drunk on the heady lore of Arabia which is wine and spell combined. He was then a thin, dark, rather ruffled young man, very intelligent and informed, a trifle defiant, ambitious, I suppose, under his cool exterior, and able to talk when interested. Otherwise he was silent, and still agreeable. He had considerable charm.

In later years, both he and St. John Philby crossed the great Rub al Khali, the empty quarter of Southern Arabia. They travelled in different ways and from opposite directions. Philby by then was a Moslem, in the service of Ibn Saud. He had broken with the British Government to serve the great Wahabi leader whose star he had always recognized. With the Emir's own men and with the best camels of Nejd he travelled. It was a mighty journey, but not so dangerous, I imagine, as the crossing achieved with only his own wits and wisdom—as a known Christian—by Bertram Thomas, while he held a British official post in the Sultanate of Oman.

It would have been interesting if we could have foreseen our diverse futures, as we planned a journey intended to be something of a picnic. For I was then limelit by the attentions of the press. It was supposed I should 'go far', though the most divergent directions were prophesied. Philby was surely the natural heir to the great Doughty. Already he knew more about Arabia than anyone else. He was obstinate, fearless, outrageously honest and therefore implacable in his convictions. He believed most men fools and did not hesitate to say so. His brain absorbed facts with the facility of a sponge filled under a tap. His memory hoarded them. He was generous in his appreciation when he happened to admire and meticulously critical when he did *not*. For years he had been right—while his colleagues and his country had been very wrong indeed. Being so right was as bad for him as jaundice. He became too much of a rebel. His great talents and his enormous store of knowledge, his experience and his unbounded energy have

been wasted. At this moment, there is not enough paper for him to write what he could and should chronicle about 'the heart of Arabia'. No other European knows it as he does.

Bertram Thomas has followed another path. He has gone from success to success. Oxford honours, government appointments, suitable—and sensible—war service somewhere in the lands whose languages he speaks and whose leaders he has cultivated . . . all these things have come to the wise young man who used his talents in the market of life. St. John Philby buried his under an overwhelming determination to learn for himself. He has learned, but he has not the gift—or it may be a quality—of inducing others to share and approve his knowledge. He is more than ever a rebel. His great achievements do not always save him from reproach. Bertram is more than ever a success. It does not, I think, content him. I am neither one nor the other. I am still a gypsy, my first love the sun.

Petra did not turn out entirely as we planned. It was intended to be very comfortable. Dora Philby, a delicious person, had packed much food. Bertram was determined on a sufficiency of arms. I had bargained for good saddles, blankets and the carcase of a sheep. It would be fun, I thought, to eat well and be warm at night. We started by car. When the road ended, we continued on horseback.

Philby suddenly decided we must travel light. He had a horror of encumbrances. So food, rifles and spare bedding were at the last moment left behind. We could buy from the Wilad Ali, he said. We could sleep in caves.

Doubtfully, I thrust some food into my pockets and hid a small revolver in my shirt. Bertram did much the same. These and Sherif Ali's rifle were the only weapons we had when the Wilad Ali held us up—in the evening, at the opening of a narrow passage between high cliffs, called the Sik. This leads into Petra and is well suited to an ambush.

It was a most unpleasant night. We had little to eat and what there was tasted of sand. The Bedouin made a great show of their arms. They wanted the tribute which, since the Turkish retreat and the disturbances consequent on war, they had levied by force. Shots were fired.

Philby was curt and unconcerned. Bertram Thomas excelled in speech. But we had to dismount and settle for the night upon a sloping shelf of rock. Off this I rolled whenever I fell asleep, but we could not be attacked from behind.

The Wilad Ali tried a war of nerves, but it did not succeed. Philby became completely impassive. Sherif Ali thirsted to fight. In the dawn, we breakfasted. All I remember eating was a fragment of bacon coated in sand. As a wife I thought Dora too good to be true, for she did not refer—by word or implication—to the adequate preparations she and I had made. We might have been accustomed to forag-

ing like jackals, or—as a matter of conscience—dependent on manna.

St. John Philby had the grace to smile over that cheerless meal, punctuated by all the sounds which can be induced from rifles in impatient hands. Sherif Ali said, "If you will not fight, you must pay." Bertram said, "Let me have another go at them, I'll make them see sense." Philby said, "They'll wear themselves out. Nothing will happen." He was right.

We wasted a considerable time. Then, unwashed, dusty and haggard, we were allowed to proceed. In single file we rode into the defile. Rocks rose sheer on either side. They were iron-dark and shut out the light. It seems to me that we rode in a curious half-light with no visible sky. The cliffs must have narrowed over our heads. It was dramatic. Through deep pools of shadow, our horses waded. Then, suddenly, there was a streak of brilliant, flamingo-coloured light. Sunshine fell across the front of a temple and we caught a glimpse of it where the rocks parted.

It is so long ago. I do not remember the details, only that vision of red sandstone, vivid in the dawn light. The defile opened into a succession of hollows, carved or worn out of the hills. The temples, whether Nabataean or Roman, were wrought in the living rock. Some of them went deep into the earth, so that we had an impression of life underground. Everything was the colour of geranium petals, faded where the sun was hottest. As Philby had discarded the tents, we slept in a tomb or a roofless temple. Sherif Ali—the incomparable warrior—objected to such discomfort. He used to prowl around at night, collecting our blankets. Even this ill-gotten warmth did not satisfy him. Wistfully he gazed at my stretcher bed pitched against a crumbling Roman wall. From this, I had refused to be parted, and as I carried it on my own saddle, nobody could reasonably object. Mournfully, he regarded the flea-bags in which the Philbys braved wind and rain. "Wallahi!" he mourned. "Here am I cold in one corner and there are you and Mr. Thomas cold in two others. Only Mr. and Mrs. Philby are warm. Truly marriage is more satisfying than blankets."

Ali ibn Hussein admired Dora's Venetian red hair. "It is nearly as beautiful as henna," he said, when sunrise flamed over the dead city and brought us all, rough-headed and bleary-eyed, from our make-shift sleep. After much bargaining with the unamiable Wilad Ali, he procured a bunch of fresh green leaves and presented them to Mrs. Philby, so that she might turn her tawny tiger-lily head into the fierce, metallic reds approved in the harems of Arabia.

We all laughed at the young Sherif's standards of beauty. He used to recite the verses of *El Magnun Leila*—your smile is like sunshine flashing on swords drawn in battle—and the old description of beauty from "The Thousand Nights and One"—her cheeks are like smooth goat's butter, her chin as a ball in a cup, her eyes the gazelle's;

her waist the lion's, her gait the elephant's and her hips so heavy that she sways between them like a flower.

My shingle horrified him out of all reticence. "It is a shame upon you," he murmured. "Why has Allah cursed you in this way? Hide your head or you will never get a husband."

Apart from the amusement provided by the predatory habits and the ideas of Sherif Ali, who the Emir Abdullah thought would make me a satisfactory husband, all I remember of our stay in Petra is walking after St. John Philby. I have never known any man walk so much, or, it seemed to the rest of us, so unnecessarily.

Sherif Ali used to sit down on a convenient rock, a great brown bird in the folds of his burnous. "I am neither a camel nor a goat," he would mutter.

Persistent as time, St. John Philby would proceed, generally upwards. After a while his devoted wife would sink in whatever shade there happened to be. "I really don't see any good . . ." she would begin, frowning a little, and add, "Well, you go on, Sita——"

We went on. I do not think there was a hill we did not climb, a cave, a tomb, a temple we did not enter. Bertram wisely disappeared. I do not remember any Arabs. It seems to me that St. John Philby—remarkable man—strode always ahead, solid, tireless, observant, accurate and unimaginative. Patiently I followed. I knew nothing of archaeology. Countries to me are the people who live in them. History is the record of human lives. So when Philby picked up, on some barren hill, a fragment of stone or metal, it meant nothing to me. I would much rather have sat below in the amphitheatre. There I could watch the sun creep across the red of carved rocks and dream of the spice caravans which Freya Stark describes in the first inimitable chapter of her *Southern Gates of Arabia*. By way of Petra—this strange, half underground city, market of two thousand years ago—a Roman Emperor, making the ground tour, sent a camel load of frankincense to his old tutor with orders not to be too lavish in his offerings to the gods of the Capitol.

Philby was not interested in such delicious visions. He wanted proof. He went on till he got it. Hence the state of our feet.

## CHAPTER XII

1923

### *From Ascot to the Atlas and el Raisuli*

THE FIRST YEARS of my married life were spent more in Africa and Arabia than in our small, complicated part of a house in South Audley Street. But each summer Arthur and I went far afield in Europe.

For eight years, my husband was at the War Office, in M.I. For four, he was head of the European section and obliged to travel among countries developing the ambitions, griefs and grievances assured by the Peace Conference.

Frontiers were awry and minorities persecuted as a matter of course. For each small, new state created out of a historical dream was desperately struggling for autonomy of race at the cost of common sense. Freud alone could have been content in Central Europe between 1921 and 1939. Complexes and fixations swelled. Markets were lost. Banks failed. Mr. Montagu Norman had brilliant visions. He very nearly saved the Successor States. Loans were arranged, but Germany made the most practical use of them. America intervened, was bored, was dismayed, lost money and gave up hope.

All over the Continent social values were mislaid. Politics took the place of traditional and personal responsibilities. Wilson's 'national choice' was stretched to include factions, tribes and sects. Provinces longed for self-determination in the face of logic and the hard factors of commercial and agricultural distribution.

Travelling the length and breadth of Europe, Arthur and I could only be amazed and appalled by the number of 'irredenti' created by overworked and overtired politicians at Versailles. No country was content. Roumania suffered from too much. She could not digest the surfeit of other people's possessions which she had been given. Czecho-Slovakia was in the same state, with minorities persistent and pernicky in their discontent. Bulgaria and Hungary had too little. The first was trying to be modern—without a port. The second had been saved from the red plague of Bela Kun to lapse into old-fashioned feudalism. Austria was in rags, too tattered to be mended. The Anschluss—opposed by France—or a customs federation with her neighbours might have been a darning-needle, before Germany took it upon herself to provide a new and ill-fitting suit.

The Baltic States were even more pathetic than the unnaturally swollen or shrunken Balkans. With the unpronounceable names of heroes lost in archaic mist, they fed the 'eternal fire' of their nationalism. It had been newly lit, and was quickly extinguished by the Soviet Union. Poland bit off a stray capital in Wilna. Germany—starving materially and spiritually—and Russia, growing to austere and lonely strength, played chess with what remained.

For anyone who looked beyond the hospitalities of the new, doubtful nations, equally greedy of territorial perquisites, equally shortsighted in their treatment of minorities, it was easy to see the threat of dissolution under the swaddling bands applied immediately after birth.

Travelling in Europe between the two wars was exciting, painful, gay and disillusioning. So many individual kindnesses I remember and such bitter and destructive racial hatreds! The persecutions which

in earlier centuries were a matter of class and religion had become national policy. All over the Europe created at Versailles and Trianon men doubted, feared and plotted. War bred inevitably on hopes too long deferred, on betrayal and disillusionment. The atmosphere of spiritual and cultural poverty proved as disruptive as the varying tragedies of unemployment and alternating political extremes.

Inertia and intolerance are dangerous companions. In Central Europe youth was familiar with both. Macedonians, Croats, Bulgars, Bessarabians, Austrian nobles and Magyar peasants, Baltic barons, Lith and Lett nationalists, Finn farmers, Moslem merchants and Christian tribesmen in Albania, Czech burghers and Serb patriots, rebels, bandits, pastors and liberal parliamentarians, Communists, and Catholics were all asking for the same thing, while insuring its impossibility. Europe needed federation instead of racial determination. Her people needed work and food, not politics. But frontiers were prison bars and minorities a spreading corruption. Arthur—as an official—and I as an onlooker, both of us polyglot in ideas and cheerfully international in our friendships, saw all this. When we were not enjoying ourselves in the houses of our friends—Poles, Dutch, Germans, Hungarians, Serbs, Roumanians, Norwegians, Swedes, Bulgars, and Greeks—we watched the cauldron boil.

Mr. Baldwin once said to me—in the train, on the way to a Colchester oyster feast at which we were both going to speak—that the condition of Europe was a pyramid of compromises. I retorted that its lack of equilibrium suggested the pyramid inverted and only maintained in its unbalanced position by a succession of conjuring tricks. "It will last my time," said Mr. Baldwin, puffing at the pipe which added so much to his popularity.

Arthur and I knew it would not last our time, or the time of our youngest friends—Slavs, Latins and Teutons. But we could do nothing.

I remember so well a particularly intelligent and well-informed Colonel in Military Intelligence being shunned because, in effect, he knew too much about Germany. Later, he was head of the German section at the War Office, and it was a common remark in other Ministries, "Oh, don't go and see so-and-so. He'll depress you."

In the world we knew best, neither Arthur nor I could escape from the tangled improbabilities of Europe. We were conscious of Hungary needing industry, Bulgaria a sea-board, Roumania a territorial emetic, Russia acknowledgement, Poland security, the Baltic States a future, France fewer fears and suspicions, Czecho-Slovakia a pruning-knife for her minorities were overgrown, Germany self-respect, and Austria everything from food to face-saving. But England was bored with international affairs. Everybody hoped for miracles. We danced and raced and week-ended in common with the rest of our generation. My husband wrote excellent unemotional reports. I wrote articles.

They were unprejudiced and therefore unpopular. In Russia I was put on the shelf as a bourgeoisie and so of no account. In Nazi Germany I was considered too red, and at one time forbidden publication. I disappointed many of my Arab friends because I paid tribute to Jewish achievements in Palestine. In America I was considered an idealist, in France *une femme fatale*, but not in the sense of sex.

Out of perversity, because life seemed to me—of set and foolish purpose—difficult, I wore the largest hats at Ascot and was much photographed and paragraphed. At the time, it pleased me. For like the rest of the unremittingly publicized, I suffered from periods of silliness. They were, I hope, short.

With two queens, one a Scandinavian and one a Balkan, I talked over this matter of 'celebrity'. We agreed that royalty is in an easier position, for its red carpet is assured. Other kinds of celebrity are like a comet. One day people stand on chairs to look at you. They are more than disappointed if diffidence prevents you from supplying the show they expect. That day applause is outrageously exaggerated. You know it. Yet if you fail to meet it with the gestures required, you are considered a monster of conceit. Next day you are forgotten. That would be satisfactory and even comforting, but for the uncertainty of such oblivion. Its duration is not determined by logic. At any moment—without warning—the comet may return.

Royalty can walk serene upon its red carpet. The holes will be of its own making. The least it does is welcome. The same is always expected of it. But for 'celebrity'—that much distorted and generally misapplied word—the way is difficult. It is also extremely doubtful. Far too much is asked of it. It never knows what it is going to find in between the extremes—equally terrifying to fundamental common sense—of official reprobation and popular ecstasy. Therefore—unless they are armoured by exceptionally developed egotism—'celebrities' must protect their frailties and their vulnerability by some hardy perennial growth. It is at once a support—like the stakes round which scarlet-runner beans display their originality—and the proverbial 'red herring'.

The largest of hats were a help to me. The press enjoyed them. They successfully disguised my earnestness, my painful inferiority complex and my quest for a mission. Under them I smothered a good deal of distress. When Queen Mary spoke to me at Ascot it was to ask not the scope of a journey in Arab disguise across uncharted desert, but the origin of my chiffon coat, dripping from chin to heel with black monkey fur. With cynicism, I noted the different tone of our conversation. Her Majesty was delightfully in command of the situation.

One particular Ascot I remember, in 1923. It was fine and on Gold Cup day my hat was so enormous that it would not go into the car. We had to put it in a box on the luggage carrier. Dresses that year

were outrageous. I wonder if we shall ever go back to such formless elaboration. There was sun, there were strawberries and cream. There were friends—by this time much of our own age. There were cameras clicking and a Philistinian sense of well-being. For I lost nothing which mattered, not even, I think, my sense of proportion.

In two years of incessant publicity, I had grown tired of reading about myself. The second stage of the disease was upon me. I still enjoyed photographs—perhaps it would have been amusing to keep them as a superficial record of life. But there were too many of them. I like space and light. Dust and inherited chaos, memories, regrets, letters, medals, portraits—the things one has written or said—all these make the same litter. I want to be free of them. I have not a picture of my husband or copies of my own books. I have never kept a love-letter. So I am as free as it is possible for one of my family and nature to be.

Into the middle of the pleasant nonsense which was that—or any—Ascot, came a letter from Mr. Thornton Butterworth asking if I would go at once to Morocco. He wanted the biography of el Raisuli, brigand, warrior, prophet and politician, lineal descendant of the Prophet Mohammed and in effect Sultan of the Atlas Mountains. "I don't know how you can get to him," wrote the unduly expectant publisher, "but please manage it before Abdul Krim murders him."

Raisuli, at that time, was in camp at Tazrut, nominally within the Spanish zone, but far out of Spain's reach. There was a pause in the long-drawn-out war between Madrid politicians and Riff mountaineers. Forty thousand Spaniards had lost their lives or were to lose them in Morocco. Disasters had been heaped as Pelion upon the unrepenting Ossa. Spanish women had thrown themselves upon the railway lines to prevent trains full of reinforcements starting for Africa. Already the word Morocco meant death, misery, intrigue, political graft and chicanery to average Spaniards. *They have not yet forgotten* what happened twenty years ago.

The Caudillo and his brother-in-law, the Falangist Foreign Minister, Señor Suárez, may design imperial enterprise after the plans of Queen Isabella. Greatest lady of her times, a strong ruler, a loyal friend and an honest statesman, she left as a testament to her people the directions, "Hold Gibraltar and colonize North Africa."

Franco is, of all things, a Colonial General, and he has made no secret of his ambitions, but between him and a Spanish empire lie not only the troops of Britain, America and France, but those forty thousand lives wasted in the Riff wars.

Raisuli—in reality or Raisuni—represented to the Moors the champion of Islam against the Christian, of the old against the new. Yet from his youth he foresaw the inevitable intervention of Europe and determined to manipulate it in Morocco as he chose. He was head of fifteen hundred Alani Sherifs and of an ancient race inseparable



from the soil of the mountains. The hillmen, alternately protected and oppressed, were his own. He used to say, "This is *my* land and you are *my* people. While I live nothing shall be taken from you."

Adventure came to the young Raisuli in the shape of a woman whose house had been robbed by bandits. The lad to whom she appealed for help raised a company of quixotes, and having rescued the village woman's possessions, he continued the game. Soon lust of war and lust of gold changed his original purpose. He and his friends were outlawed. The Sultan Mulai Hassan ordered their arrest. Raisuli was betrayed and spent five years in prison. There he learned patience and simplicity, accepting his fate as 'the will of Allah'. He found that 'the world is as large as a man's imagination', and planned accordingly. Released before he was thirty, with the whole scale of suffering and emotion as soil for his garnered energies, he set about wresting from circumstance a stable independence which should be the basis of power.

From 1900 onwards, he played with the various forces at work in Morocco for his own ends. The capture of the American Consul, Perdicaris (in 1904), secured him seventy thousand dollars from the government of U.S.A., and the province of Fahs from the harried Sultan. Theodore Roosevelt sent warships to Tangiers with the ultimatum, "Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead!" The President got his consul, unhurt and full of admiration for his captor, but it was the bandit who profited. As governor of Fahs he was successful—in the eyes of the tribesmen. For they did not object to decapitated heads, but the Europeans disapproved of such decoration to the landscape. They protested to the Sultan in Fez. His Highness sent troops to reduce the strongholds of the man whose power threatened his own.

Raisuli retired to his mountains, defeated the official forces, and in 1907 captured Sir Harry Maclean. For the Englishman's release he received £20,000 and the protection of Britain. This gave him security. Position he had already established. Legends were rife. The hillmen said he had a charmed life. After the battles, into which he rode in a white woollen burnous, mounted on a white horse, he shook spent bullets from his clothes. They could not pierce the 'protection of Allah'. From one end of Morocco to another, men swore by 'the barraka'—the blessing of Raisuli.

In 1908 he made peace with the Sultan. At a meeting, long kept secret, they took a solemn oath, "Never to cease protecting the Moslem land and the Moslem people from the Christian."

This vow Raisuli kept. Shrewd and far-sighted, he realized that Europe must come into the Atlas, and that France would be much more dangerous than Spain. The brigand had turned into an administrator. With prophetic insight, the warrior became a politician. In 1911 he took the supreme step of allowing Spanish troops to land at Larache. The appointed champion of Islam, sworn to the protection

of his mountain land, realized that he could not successfully oppose all forms of European occupation. He must therefore choose the least menacing and reduce it to negligible proportions.

Spain has never been a successful colonist. General after general went to Morocco. Some allied themselves with the subtle and clever and cruel Raisuli. Others pitted wits and force against him. Invariably they lost.

In 1915, with Europe ablaze, the Sherif found himself all powerful in the mountains. His armies fought with Spain to open the Tangier-Tetuan road and hold it against German intrigue, but Raisuli would not pledge himself to either side. He intended that his country should benefit either from the Kaiser or from republican France. Spain by this time he had measured and found wanting.

The Armistice of 1918 found him with eight thousand trained riflemen ready to pledge themselves to the Jihad—a holy war which might have spread the length of North Africa.

Five years later, when Thornton Butterworth demanded the biography of this incorrigible plotter who had successfully balanced the ambitions of France, Spain and Germany in Morocco, Raisuli was Sultan of the Mountains, and holy to all his people. He lived in camp at Tazrut, alternately fighting the Spaniards and treating with them. But a new power had arisen in the Riff. There Abdul Krim, the erstwhile clerk, with no descent from the Prophet to sharpen his weapons with fanaticism, was struggling with France as well as Spain. Abdul Krim represented the young Moslems, who believed in the League of Nations and Wilson's Fourteen Points. The sword of Omar they had laid aside for pens and modern rifles. So Geneva was destined to exchange the tongue of Gabriel, the flaming blade of Michael, for typewriters and beautiful new red tape.

In 1923 everything of concern to Morocco was reported to Raisuli as soon as it appeared in a European paper. This I knew. So I made plans with unusual guile. To a cocktail party I summoned two or three gay young columnists as discreet as chameleons. To them I confided, in the utmost secrecy, that I was about to leave upon the 'hushiest' of missions to Morocco. In the atmosphere of our Chinese-box house, they swore black and blue—no word should escape their lips. Back in their newspaper offices, the colour-scheme changed. With red pencils—urgent and flaring—they wrote of my 'secret' mission. The great and the wise enjoyed the joke. A daily paper indulged in a delicious caricature of an elaborately-disguised Rosita surrounded by cameras slinking dramatically upon a Guy Fawkes errand! Great fun, thought everybody. Trust a woman to give herself away, muttered the misogynists. It all worked very well.

The Duke of Alba, who was in the plot and amused by it, gave me a letter to his cousin, then Foreign Minister in Madrid. My own cousin, Wyndham Torr, was for a long time Military Attaché there, and

fills the same post to-day. He was a great friend of the late king and a member of his polo-team. I do not remember if Wyndham was in the capital when I arrived that August, but I think he must have been, for the King, in residence at San Sebastian, received me privately on a brief visit to the Escorial. It is very difficult to describe kings. I think it is impossible to be honest about them. They are trained to so definite a pattern that they cannot escape it in ordinary conversation. In later years, I met King Alfonso often with his devoted friends in London, but I never knew him. He had a great deal of dignity, and in exile much less adaptability or resource than the rulers of Greece and Portugal. Even in the Escorial I thought him forlorn. He was already a figure very much out of keeping with the times. It is said of the Bourbons that they "never learn anything and never forget anything".

The King seemed to me quiet, unassuming and interested in ideas. He was determined to the pitch of obstinacy and—as it turned out—better informed about history than contemporary events. He had a prodigious store of other people's opinions from which to choose, but I imagine his position as an autocratic monarch, and the heritage of his distinguished but unfortunate race, made it difficult for him to differentiate between truth and wishful thinking. The position of kings might be intolerable if they could see for themselves. Or it might be more assured. The best of them depend on their power of sifting conviction—if not fact—from the conflicting opinions presented to them. The worst rely on yes-men, who create for them an erroneous impression of infallibility. This generally leads to exile or assassination.

King Alfonso had very good manners. He was generous to his friends and had great faith in them. He was, I imagine, without fear. He was indiscreet.

That surprising man Raisuli having heard—as was intended—of my supposed mission in Morocco, ordered his cousin Mulai Sadiq to get in touch with me as soon as I arrived. In Tetuan I met the old Sherif. He preferred learning to cleanliness. When excited, he was apt to tear off his turban and thump it on his knees. I found him sitting on the floor among mountains of books. He had to move a number to make place for me. "My cousin would welcome you with great honour," he said, "but it is a long way. For what reason do you wish to see him?" In fact, what is this mission of yours?

Between Africa and Europe there is a barrier higher than the Riff or the Atlas. But agents of all those countries interested in the Mediterranean—France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Turkey, Britain and the Balkans—attempt with varying success to cross it. They bear gifts or instructions. They make promises. They are persuasive according to their own nature or their government's policy. The situation remains much the same under the surface. Only the agents change.



1 Winning race at Kailasa gymkhana India 2 Expectation, first journey 3 With Ronald Forbes—and a veil 4 Elephantine has Lucknow 5 Hunting in Lincolnshire 6 Leisure at Mussori

IF WE COULD GO BACK TO OUR BEGINNINGS





LNA



(Illustrations Press Agency)

1 Lady Forbes, Mrs. Bulkeley Johnson, and Rosita Forbes 2 The Arthur McGraths at Ascot. 3. Somebody's wedding, Lady Forbes and daughter, now married

ALL DRESSED UP AND SOMEWHERE TO GO

GPA



Mulai Sadiq er Raisuni—spellbound by the reports of my 'mission'—knew he would have to let me go to Tazrut. "What have you to say to the Sherif?" he asked.

Owl-like I repeated, "It can only be said to him."

So for some days we fenced. But the columnists—unwitting—had done their work well. "It is my duty to travel with you," said Mulai Sadiq at last.

Instructions from the Foreign Minister in Madrid, one Santiago Alba, had insured the help of Spanish officials in Morocco. By order of the Governor, some officers travelled with me to the outposts of Spain. For the first day they made polite and correct advances—the 'court' which they supposed due to my youth and appearance. The second day they were frankly bored. On the third, one of them told me, "There are evidently three sexes—men, women, and Doña Rosita Forbes." On this we agreed and were mutually content.

We spent a night in Xauen, so recently a holy place, mysterious and cruel. A few years ago, Christians had been tortured in the market-place. A street is still called the 'Way of the Burned'. The men of Xauen spoke a secret language, and if a stranger could not give the password at their gate, the least he could expect was that his pickled head should adorn it, suspended by the ears. The town, so deeply sunk in a cleft of the mountains that it is invisible a hundred yards from the first wall, had neither clocks nor calendars. When the Spaniards took it in October, 1920, they stepped back into the sixteenth century. Jews, barefoot and barchaded, cried to them, "Viva, Viva Elizabeth the second." As 'people of the book'—the Talmud—Jews were not persecuted by the savage Ahmas tribesmen, lords then of Xauen, but they were oppressed, because they were no fighters. Warrior Islam still lives by the sword and honours it. So Germany had her chance. So we—who are far too sentimental—may, after the exploits of the First and Eighth Armies, find opportunity again in our hands.

In Xauen, a Nubian carried my suitcase by steep, winding ways to a house out of Scheherazade's tales. It had a small scarlet door with a lantern flickering above. Dim, perfumed courts, surrounded by arches led to the coffee-hearth beside which sat my host, the Qadi. Singing birds slept in their cages. Slave women passed in the shadows. I felt time slipping backwards as if a reel were unwound. The last of the day's prayers was called from a neighbouring mosque. For twelve hundred years, a voice as sublimely arrogant had repeated the same words—"There is no God but God and He is great."

The Qadi had only two teeth. They hung out of his mouth like tusks. His manners were beautiful and unhurried. He seemed to be made of parchment, wrapped in dust. Prayer and history perfumed his presence. Even his voice was unreal. It was as if letters crept rustling from a printed page and made slow words to talk to me.

"The blessing of Allah be upon you. For you go to see the Sherif. He is a great man and the last of them."

So the name of Raisuli began to haunt my journey and the image of the man grew to enormous proportions. "With er Raisuni will pass much of Morocco," said an Alim.<sup>1</sup> "You will not understand his ways. Perhaps he will not talk to you at all, but—Ullah! his mind works all the time while he watches you. Nobody knows what he thinks, but he reads the minds of men. That is his power." "It is true," said a Spaniard. "He is a great psychologist."

On we went into the hills, hearing always of Raisuli. We had started the journey in a huge Hispano-Suiza. We ended it on horses. At Suq el Khemis, the Spanish officers took their leave. "From here onwards all that you see belongs to the Sherif."

Raisuli's own men met me under the shadow of Jebel Alan, where his ancestors are buried. The temperature was 108 Fahrenheit. I felt as if I were shut into an oven. There was no air in the stony valleys through which we rode. My thighs stuck to the heavily padded Berber saddle. The white horse Raisuli had sent for me became dark with sweat. A dry, burning wind met us among the rocks of Beni Aras, but we pushed on, old Mulai Sadiq drooping over his mule. In moonlight we came to Tazrut. "This is your home," said Sherif Badr ed Din who, with the Kaid el Meshwar el Menebhe, had been sent to meet me.

We had passed a number of camps before we reached the Zawia, battered by Spanish planes, where Raisuli lived. Beside the mosque we rode, and into a court containing the domed tomb of a seventeenth-century ancestor of the Sherif. Two hundred yards further on a great tent had been pitched. It was black and white with a fig tree shading the opening. The lining was of gay damask and rugs were piled on the floor. Mattresses covered with white lincn lay against the walls. There was a table with huge brass candlesticks on it, one prodigious chair specially carpentered to take the weight and bulk of Raisuli and silver flasks containing orange water. "This is all yours," said Badr ed Din, "and we are your servants."

The men left me. After a while, a procession of small slaves brought food from the Zawia<sup>2</sup> where the Sherif lived on holy ground forbidden to the infidel. The meal was spread on the floor. It was very still except for the stinging shrillness of crickets. From far away came the call to prayer. For centuries that cry had drawn the swords of Islam from Mecca to the threshold of Spain. Here was I, alone upon a mountain side—in a Moslem tent, beyond the reach of Europe or the faith to which I had been born. I do not think I was afraid, but I was deeply moved. Physical pain stirred in me as it always does when I am beyond measure expectant.

<sup>1</sup> Learned man.

<sup>2</sup> Zawia is, in Islam, a sacred place, generally a college.

Badr ed Din returned by way of the moonlit garden. "The Sherif comes," he said.

The blood raced in my body. I was hot and cold. I was alert in every pulse and nerve. At last I would see Raisuli. His name had been the mainspring of our journey. On that name, it seemed, the fabric of our lives had been woven, from the moment we left the coast.

Breathless, I turned to meet a presence which filled the path between the bushes. An enormous man stood there—in front of me. He seemed as broad as he was tall—a mass of solid flesh and muscle under the brown burnous. His huge face was surrounded by a thicket of beard dyed red. The quantity of woollen garments he wore added to his bulk. Where the sleeves rolled back, his arms were of incredible girth.

I looked at him, fascinated and repelled, while he greeted me. "All the mountain is yours. You are free to go where you will. My people are your servants. They have nothing to do but to please you. I am honoured by your visit, for I have much friendship for your country."

This I believe is always true of the Arabs. For England lives by the men who serve her where Kipling's "strange roads go down". They keep her torch burning when, in the offices of Whitehall, a political draught or the accumulated dust of files and pigeon-holes threaten its extinction.

Raisuli's voice was guttural. It appeared to roll like rich silk over his lips. It came husky from a distance. We exchanged compliments. I presented the Sherif with a gold-sheathed blade. "There is but one gift for the brave—a weapon."

"You ought to have been a man," said Raisuli. "For you have speech as well as courage."

I gave him rolls of vivid silks for his new wife—a girl in her teens. And I waited for the question which I knew must come. At last Badr ed Din withdrew. The figures which had watched us from a distance disappeared. There was no longer any sound except from the crickets. I think then I was frightened. It was a monstrous trick which I had played.

"You can tell me now," said Raisuli, "what is your mission?"

There was a pause. My throat was alive—and dry. I could hardly disentangle my voice from all which seemed to be happening inside me. "To write the history of your life, Sidi," I said.

Perhaps I said more. I may have explained how Europe needed to know the truth. I recollect that we looked at each other for what seemed a long time. Silence grew between us. It could be felt. But I was desperately sincere. I always am with the Arabs. Something in my blood responds to theirs. Whatever I may know in my head while I am hard-pressed by the circumstances of Europe, I lose in an Arab tent. Then I know with my heart, instead of with my brain.



For theirs is the life which has most stirred me. Were I twenty again, I would like to live among them. Oddly enough, I find the same simplicity and the same patience or endurance in the new farms and factories of the Soviet. The faith by which the Bedouin lives is as profound as the inspiration of young Russian communists. By this similarity I have often been impressed. For the very young it must be enthralling to live in the U.S.S.R.

At last, while I passed from fear to cool acceptance, for 'what is written is written' and must come to pass—Raisuli laughed. It was as the roll of drums. He slapped a prodigious thigh and his merriment echoed across the walls of the Zawia. "You shall stay," he said.

For weeks I lived in the black and white tent on the edge of a forest, where the sons of Raisuli hunted boar. If I had four hours uninterrupted sleep I was fortunate. By six in the morning the place was astir. Breakfast consisted of thick vegetable soup with morsels of fat floating in it. There was no more food till three or four in the afternoon, when an immense meal, containing many meat courses, was brought to me by slaves. They carried the platters shoulder high as if they were offerings of ceremony. Often Raisuli ate with me, or Badr ed Din, or the Kaid, or the old Haj Embarik who best understood my Eastern Arabic. He used to wake me each morning by stumbling—on purpose—over the tent ropes.

When Raisuli became interested in his own story, he lost all sense of time. Once he talked from seven in the morning till mid-afternoon. Often he would arrive before the day's big meal and—hardly troubling to eat—talk without pause till two or three next morning. He did not tell a consecutive tale. Incidents which amused him were repeated again and again. Mulai Sadiq and Badr ed Din acted as a Greek chorus, emphasizing the theme as it developed. Several favourite slaves punctuated or interrupted the recital. One who was always at Raisuli's stirrup in battle added dramatic details.

My notes were scribbled in the wildest confusion as I grasped at the Moorish dialects, or Haj Embarik translated into what he imagined Egyptian.

I grew accustomed to writing while violent argument flared between the Arabs as to when such and such a thing had happened, or if a soldier—recently found dead in the mountains—had been killed by a tribesman or accidentally shot by his own people. Berber and Moorish voices rose to a pitch which in any other country would have meant murder. Spain was demanding an explanation of that soldier's death. He haunted the whole of my stay in Tazrut. From an account of prison or battle or rape, pilgrim and warrior would turn suddenly to the fate of the insignificant Calabrian whose body was hardly buried. With difficulty I excluded him from my book.

Straining my vocal chords, I out-screamed the Arabs in my anxiety

to get back to history. "What happened then?" I repeated. Day in, day out, hour after hour—in the tent of the Sherif, later on, in the Zawia itself, I asked, "What happened, what happened next?"

At last I had the whole story. It was a brilliant patchwork of Eastern mentality, profound and childish, subtle, cruel and philosophical, fabulously generous, fearless and beset by superstition, shrewd and failing only because of a fanatical acceptance of fate. It held the quality of all time, unchanging between the flight of Mohammed the Prophet from Mecca and the Pan-Islamic vision of the sophisticated Turkish intellectual, Enver Pasha. The latter was killed during the last war on the Central Asian plateau where Alexander planned a world that should be new.

I neither added to Raisuli's account, nor subtracted from it. It was a masterly interpretation of life, but not mine. The Sherif did everything but write the book. Reviewers in America and England found his work good.

While I was in Tazrut, Raisuli took a painted wooden stick and in ink thick as honey, wrote for me, "Glory to Allah, on Monday, the 7th day of Moharram the holy, the first month of the year 1342, there came to visit us the beautiful, the precious pearl, the learned, well-educated Sayeda Rosita Forbes, the Englishwoman. We received her with goodwill and hospitality and honour and all respect which are her due because she has placed her feet in our country, which is honoured by her presence. We pray Allah all powerful that this may not be the last meeting, for we desire to see this visit repeated many times, and we hope from the good Allah that this will happen as He is powerful to make it happen.

"I sign on this day, Ahmed ben Mohammed el Raisuni, that Allah may preserve him."

Within a year, Raisuli was captured by Abdul Krim. He died in the latter's house. Nobody knows what passed between the descendant of the Prophet, who had learned to believe in his own 'barraka' and the clerk translated into an astute fighter. In time the Riffs were defeated by a combination of France and Spain. It was the Foreign Legion which decided the battle. Abdul Krim was made prisoner. Without the fatalism of Raisuli he could not accept defeat. His wars had been a gamble with Fate. Raisuli had—according to his belief—carried out the will of Allah. What was written—for both—was accomplished.

## CHAPTER XIII

*Winter, 1923/24*

### *First Lectures in the U.S.A.*

IN THE WINTER following my visit to el Raisuni, I went to the U.S.A. to lecture. It was enormously interesting and far more exhausting than any amount of desert travel. Unfortunately, it was the moment of the 'Sheek'. So I arrived in New York with one purpose and Americans welcomed me with another. They wanted romance. I wanted a United States of Arabia.

On the dock, there was some confusion among reporters who expected a combination of whipcord and leather. I wore vermilion under a pencil-slim fur coat. When my unassuming figure was pointed out to the representative of the *Herald*, he exclaimed, "That girl ride camels? Smokes them, you mean!"

The special writer who insisted on interviewing me with the morning coffee put me at once in my place. She said, "Well, I don't see anything unusual about you. It seems to me you are much like any other girl." Whether she expected a camel in the closet and a 'Sheek' under the pillow I do not know. Evidently she felt she had been a trifle harsh, for when her fountain-pen gave out, she patted my hand and said, "Never mind, Honey, I guess you've been a disappointment to many."

For the next four months, I disappointed the colleges and the clubs which supposed Rudolph Valentino had set an example to Arabia.

Under the wing of the Pond Bureau, I spoke to the American Geographical Society in New York, and on learned platforms in Boston and Philadelphia. Then I went West. I think I gave eighty-eight lectures in ninety-one days, but I was by no means an undiluted success. For the headlines screaming across the continent were dissident in their tenor. A serious paper accorded me several columns headed, "English woman aims to organize U.S. of Arabia." Simultaneously, a popular paper announced, "Rosita a bad girl—says Sheeks homely, wrinkled."

James Pond, who is something of a philosopher, put the matter succinctly when he said, "You don't *look* like what you *want*!" A famous New York paper evidently thought I wanted a great deal. Its columnist wrote, "In bygone ages Mrs. Forbes would probably have been a crusader in shining armour like Joan of Arc. To-day, she is a traveller in the wild places of the earth, possessed of strange informations, astonishing acquaintances and momentous convictions." The last sentence seems to me an exact description. The writer continued

with equal acumen, "She now purposes . . . the formation of a Confederation of Arab states. . . . No man . . . would undertake a task so difficult, so devoid of the backing of accurate history, so sure to be barren of political or financial rewards, so contrary to the general prejudices of white people. . . ." Astounded by the size of my vision—and its improbability—the amiable journalist informed his readers that I was "young, beautiful in an astonishing way, fired with a genius for adventure and for constructive thought". "It is a curious ambition," he reflected, "for this very well-dressed, very modern, very cultivated, unusually lovely Englishwoman with her soft voice and charming manner. . . . Her sympathies are for wild places and primitive human beings, for the deeper politics of international relationships, for the preservation of simple peoples against destruction by the perhaps cynical and always uncomprehending minds of modern statesmen complicated by the rapid interchange of trifling thought and the dearth of real philosophy."

I had just written a novel called *Quest*. It should have been a travel book, for it was an attempt to put into perspective the various struggles for freedom among the peoples of the Middle East. American reporters said, "The socio-political elements are out of proportion to the story—although it is a good piece of sound literary workmanship. Rosita Forbes is more concerned with the politics and the conditions of Arabia than with romance."

It was difficult during those exaggeratedly publicized months in America to disentangle myself and my dull but honest intentions from the web of illusion deliberately woven by the press. A weekly invented the flattering myth, "Rosita Forbes is reported to be the most beautiful woman in England. The same is said of Lady Diana Manners, at present playing in *The Miracle*. Mrs. Forbes is beautiful and she has a dramatic manner which should be most effective on the platform. Having come from shooting lions in Africa, she finds herself the lion of New York." Both statements with regard to the royal beast were equally incorrect. I have never even shot *at* a lion.

So, between such headlines as "Sheeks as tame as kittens" and "Fever of independence spreads among Moslem Peoples", "European political squabbling breaks doctrine of Kismet" and "Rosita Forbes as much a mystery as Sahara", I journeyed the length and breadth of America. I spoke to every kind of audience and found them generously intent. It seemed to me that America thirsted for anything which could be labelled information. Universities, cultural associations, museums, scientific or political societies, religious organizations, men's quick-lunch clubs, feminist societies were all equally anxious for facts. But they would have liked 'sheeks' as well. In those days, any American woman under fifty regretted my insistence that the quality of desert Sheikhs had not changed since Abraham provided the model.

So the *leit motif* of my life remained—much as the dance of the skeletons in *Der Freischütz*. For I talked earnestly of Anglo-Saxon responsibility across the Bridge of Asia, while clubmen as well as clubwomen—enthralled by the newspaper mirage—asked in private and in public, “Is there romance in the desert?”

In America, I received more kindness than I had previously imagined possible. I made friends and kept them—or they were good enough to keep me. Innumerable women were graciously hospitable, in enormous houses fully staffed, in neat, handbox apartments and in those compact, well-fitted homes run by one pair of hands which express the domestic genius of the States.

It is difficult to remember what most impressed me on that first working visit. I had been to America before to stay with friends, so I was accustomed to the soaring skylines, the plumbing, the vegetables, the friendly rush of life, its eagerness and its organization. I was used to perfection of shape in legs, and to feeling like a registered parcel, despatched with convenience, speed and security from one place to another.

I do remember being amazed at the prodigious length of railway tickets, the publicity of night travel, the gregarious habits of the nation at large, the interest and the earnestness of almost everybody in almost everything. But most of all, I was impressed by the looks of women, the power of women, the average discontent of married women over thirty, the condensing of women into club life, the efficiency and the success of business women and the surprising division of decades rather than generations.

In England at that time, there were no particular paddocks in which debs and sub-debs, young marrieds and young mothers, the bridge-playing twenty-five-year-olds or the lecture-attending forties were fenced apart. But, staying with exciting new friends from Chicago, Denver, or Pittsburg, to Virginia, Washington and New England—I found myself clearly labelled not according to my tastes and habits, but by reason of Arthur’s persistence in marrying me and the age to which I had attained.

Many services America did me. With her genius for living and her reasoned determination to turn one talent into ten, she gave me a lasting inspiration. I could not live without America. She restores my sense of proportion, unduly cramped in Europe, stretched beyond logic in Africa or Arabia.

In the States I was accorded my first constructive criticism. For success had come to me so fast and with such unexpected violence that I had had no time to learn how to write. My first books were like the tapestry in ancient castles. Everything went into them—dragons, gods and goblins! I could not sort, I could not limit my impressions. I could not stop my sentences. They ran away, riotous as a young hunter in sight of hounds.

An editor buttressed behind his desk, deaf to an accumulation of noises—typewriters and telephones, the elevated railway on a level with his window—said, ‘Do you think Lizzie would understand?’

I had asked him to publish an earnest analysis of conditions in Palestine.

The great man spoke above a concatenation of sounds worse than the crickets outside Raisuli’s tent. “There are more Lizzies in the world than anyone else. It’s that type of mind you’ve got to get at.”

I reduced the articles I had planned—in stature they became reasonable and in shape less ornate. A Middle-Western editor told me, “I know you’ve been places, but you write your facts like fiction. You got to make them sound true.” He instanced the works of a deliciously imaginative traveller. “Now he can get away with a thousand virgins buried on a Rocky, or cannibals on Georgetown wharf. It don’t matter that they aren’t there.” “Oh!” I said. Points of view are always interesting. I decided ‘Lizzie must not only understand. She must believe.’ But how can the East and the West credit each other’s miracles?

A Chicago audience, gloating over desert adventures, refused to believe anyone could eat a sheep’s eye. It is a habit at any Arab feast to present this delectable morsel to the guest entitled to honour. Often I have tried to pretend it is an oyster—but with no co-operation from my stomach—while speculating, aghast, upon the destination of the second eye. But Chicago, already intent on balancing proteins and calories, could not swallow—in imagination—that eye. An amused young man came up to me after a lecture and said, “Sure, Ma’am, that was a whale of a story. Do you get away with it often?” He added, “I couldn’t help thinking of that eye way down inside you, seeing all the private things it should not see.”

In the Yemen I had tried to explain to tribesmen armed, oiled and shawled with skins, the working of a lift in Cairo. “Sayeda, that is a lion of a story, but do you expect men to believe it?” they said.

So it seems, one may not try to show the flesh and bones of one country to another. It is enough if one can, with accuracy, describe the skin.

In America I learned one half of my job. Perhaps it is the more important half. “The first two columns of this article are wasted,” said the editor of the famous *Saturday Evening Post*. “Don’t write about what you are going to write. Start straight away—writing it!”

James Pond trimmed speech for me in the same fashion. “Never apologize to an audience. It makes them nervous if they’re in a good temper, and critical if they’re out of humour.”

So I went back to the beginning—and profited. America did me this great service. She taught me that it is no use having seen a thing, unless you can sell your sight second-hand to other people. Sight on the spot is without astigmatism. It must be adjusted to the different-

coloured spectacles, blue, red, pink or lily-white worn by people at home.

One thing I learned which is to me important. In England we are too modest, in America they are too honest. "Do not underrate yourself. Others will do that for you," is the feeling of young and old across the Atlantic. It is practical common sense. When I was first asked in New York to write on diverse and difficult subjects—about which very often I knew nothing at all—I used to explain my limitations. From editorial expressions, I imagine it was the first time that doubt had ever been expressed in a newspaper office. "Look here, kid," said an amiable reporter, "you ain't learned your stuff." Devoutly he set himself to teach me that if you can write about anything, you are expected to be able to cover everything from minor thirds to the composition of pie-crust or the habits of a syring camel. "Don't say it isn't your subject. Nobody'll notice if you don't flag them," concluded the journalist.

There is a lot of sense in the American idea. It is more helpful to say what you can do and how much, rather than what you can *not*. We carry our diffidence to extremes, and are in consequence misjudged. How can nations have a reasonable appreciation of our qualities if we are so overwhelmed—and ashamed—by our own consciousness of these that it seems to us the height of bad form to mention them? Americans boost themselves believing they are their own best assets. Every salesman backs his own character and judgement. He is supremely adaptable, as an individual. In the mass, there is in America a rigidity of opinion out of keeping with fluid enterprise. Life there is very rarely original. This is the more remarkable in comparison with the unrivalled evolution of architecture, but it is in accord with the inventive genius which has standardized and simplified domestic existence. Americans expect everyone to make the best of himself. They accept face valuations and give them. I doubt the worth of British modesty in America. I am confident of its inconvenience. Kentucky provided me with an example. My host in the lovely blue grass country asked if I could ride. The sensible answer would have been, "Yes, I have always ridden." Instead, I murmured something non-committal. Next morning I found a groom had been sent five miles to produce a shock-proof pony which was too fat for me to mount. "What did you want to make a fool of me for?" asked my bewildered host after I had persuaded him that I could be trusted upon an ordinary hack.

Midway—after the war—we shall perhaps meet. Then Americans *may* see single. We *may* cease to portray ourselves in compound fractions while imagining that everyone else will have the good sense to look at us with a magnifying glass.

In America I made acquaintance with the beauty of Diana Cooper, the wit of Rebecca West and the charm of Lucie Rosen, the theramin

player. These three women I have admired ever since for qualities with which they are not habitually connected. Diana is exceedingly well-informed. If she had not been such a beauty, she could have done anything she liked with her brains. Rebecca, I suspect, is a romantic—in spite of her pen's surgical skill. She has that gallantry which attempts the impossible without hope of success. Lucie can make practical use of those exquisite hands, which draw music out of the air. They are as effective with household lists and a typewriter.

It is a pity that life will only allow its favourites to be admired for one aspect of character or appearance. I think I am an indifferent writer and far too agonized and impatient to be a satisfactory traveller, but I am very kind. Diana, of course, is beautiful. But she is also erudite. Rebecca flays the unwary, but what a lovely sugar-cake she has made of her own life—for the pleasure of her friends.

In America, Charles Crane, the plumbing magnate, was particularly kind to me, as he was to everybody with a dream or a conviction. He was, I suppose, a millionaire, but his possessions were fluid. One might lunch with him in a duplex apartment on Park Avenue. There would be masterpieces on the walls. Hushed footmen would serve delicacies out of season. Over-cylindereed cars, long and sleek, would bring guests from all over New York. For Charles was eclectic in his friendships. At the same lunch I once met Ruth Draper, Anna Pavlova, Wells, and Sir Percy Sykes—general and historian. Turkey's first Minister of Education, Halideh Hanoum Edib, still in favour with Mustapha Kemal, was also there, with a Macedonian Comitadje intent on revolution, a Spanish duke consistently Tory, and a South American Communist who regretted the lack of bloodshed in his country's constant revolutions.

Charles collected people as easily as Persian carpets or modern drawings. He shed all of them with equal facility. Within forty-eight hours of a party in his surprising house, so conflicting in periods human and decorative, he might give his latest collection of pictures to a museum and lend his cars to outlawed Balkan patriots. Then—with one suitcase—he would travel eastwards to visit the institutions or the rebellions which at that moment he happened to be subsidizing. He was one of the three completely happy people I have met.

The others were an apple-seller in a French provincial town—a remarkable woman round whom children and grown-ups gathered 'after school' to hear stories which always had happy endings—and an old Arab in the Sahara. He would not take money after guiding me five hundred miles. "What use would it be to me?" he asked. "Under Allah, I am rich. I have everything I need." His sole possessions were a tattered prayer-carpet, a waterskin, the clothes he wore and the goat's-hair bag in which he carried dates.

Sir Percy Sykes is part of my heritage from that American journey. I followed him across the continent. He was speaking about Persia,



for he had already written his celebrated history of that country. He followed it later with an equally important work on Afghanistan. But in spite of such achievements—tri-dimensional, for in the last war he proved himself an astute Central Asian politician as well as a fine soldier—he has always been ready to help travellers and writers at the beginning of their careers. So many of us have profited by his learning and made shameless use of his time. My first American lecture tour would have been very much less of a success had not Sir Percy contrived to prelude my arrival in town after town with the kindest references to my travels and supposed abilities.

Doctor Hogarth, the great Oxford orientalist, wrote to me when I married Arthur. "This is a fitting end to your wonder year. Others will wish you success—but I wish you peace." How wise he was. Peace I may never find, but Sir Percy is certainly among those 'others' who have not only wished me success, but with unceasing generosity, made it possible.

Regretfully, I left America. "What did you like best over here?" asked the last reporter. It was an easy question. "The people, of course."

A gay young woman said, "And what do you dislike about us?" That was more difficult. For 1924 was on a rising tide. There was a flood of development and exploitation. America did not want to think. She was more interested in growth. So I said, "The way you reduce life to a tablet, or crush it within standardized limits. The world cannot all be on an American pattern. Your skyscrapers and Monroe doctrine, your ideals and your ideas are pulling different ways."

In England, upon my return, I found the same cheerful superficiality. Nobody wanted to look into any depths. If they could pretend 'things' would work out, they did not ask at what cost, or for how long. Life was as agreeable as sweetened pie-crust. It was equally insubstantial. In revolt, I wrote a paper on "The Position of the Arabs in Art and Literature", and read it to the Royal Society of Arts. They awarded me their coveted medal. Lord Askwith chivalrously hid his boredom. Referring to my speech as "a monument of learning", he refrained from remarking on its tedium. A reporter in the audience was more honest. She described at length my "Rosita-coloured" frock—pillar-box red, I suppose—and said I had delivered myself of "an hour's stodge which even my charming little-girl smile could not relieve". How right she was—according to the mentality of those days. I was satisfied because I had let off a lot of steam. Incidentally, I had learned much about Arab historians and poets. While burrowing among ancient folios, I had made friends with Sir Denison Ross, head of the School of Oriental Languages. He helped me, during succeeding years, to entertain the most extraordinary contrasts in character from every Moslem country on the map. I was as pleased with him as by the acquisition of a medal.

*From Arabia—unexpectedly—to Abyssinia*

SINCE THE DAYS when we camped—so uncomfortably—in Petra, St. John Philby and I had talked of crossing the Rub al Khali. He was already in touch with the then Emir Ibn Saud—now King—of Nejd. In 1926 I had completed a second American lecture tour under the aegis of my friend, the perspicacious and remarkably tolerant James Pond. As a result I wanted to go as far away from mechanized civilization as possible. I felt suffocated by speeches and noise and meals at crowded tables, by furniture with legs so that one's feet were out of reach of the ground and by the rapidity of modern movement. I longed for the comforting slowness of a camel. I wanted space and silence. Nothing could be more appealing than the name of Southern Arabia. It is known as 'the empty quarter'. So Philby and I began to plot. From the beginning we bungled. Our idea was—sensibly enough—to reach Nejd by different ways. For Lord Curzon was then alive and—of all British Foreign Ministers—he most objected to unofficial ventures. So our plans had to be secret. They did not remain so long. Philby contrived to reach the west coast of Arabia by means of a tanker, from which one night in the Red Sea he transferred into a dhow. Its Raïs was in the conspiracy. He landed his surprising passenger with privacy in the desired place, but that was the end of Jack Philby's success. The British lion, with its own sources of information, was outraged at the behaviour of its cub. An official 'No' put an end either to the journey or to a civil servant's career. The choice was stark.

Meanwhile I had arrived at Bushire on the Persian Gulf with Harold Jones, a cine-cameraman who had been round the world in H.M.S. *Renown* with the Prince of Wales. For this reason he thought himself inured to discomfort. We had the intention of hiring a dhow and sailing across to the Arabian coast, but the whole plan was very silly. It would have been much easier for me to go from Syria, where I had many friends who would have helped me, across the desert to Nejd.

Philby, I think, enjoyed complicated planning, but on that occasion our failure was complete. For while he was held up in Jedda, I waited for his signal in Bushire. Weeks drew into months and it did not come. I stayed with the kindly Resident and his wife. It was great fun—and the first time I had been to Persia. I remember riding a great deal, and a terrific Christmas party at which, out of nothing, we all achieved masterpieces in masquerade. Immediately afterwards,

I received a wire from Philby asking me to meet him at Aden. By this time secrecy was in shreds. Whitehall knew all about our intentions. So did Fleet Street. In contiguous columns, the London dailies published our photographs—in Arab dress. We were described as "romantic figures". This was the culmination of my disgust.

At Aden, General Scott informed us, separately and sternly, that we must not attempt the Rub al Khali crossing. I was by that time in the depths of misery. For Philby had developed an extraordinary poisoning of one arm. A boil had swelled to the size of a young loaf and would obviously prevent any further ventures. Nobly he said he was willing to forfeit his official career for the pleasure of attempting a crossing from the south by way of Hadramaut. This was the route which Bertram Thomas took some years later—with complete success. But it would have been impossible with such an arm. So, to the prodigious discomfort of General Scott and of his A.D.C., whom he had summoned for moral support, I shed a few tears practically upon the official desk. While doing so, I thought hard. Fortunately, thoughts are invisible. The General tried to comfort me—and at the same time to ensure my departure in the *right* direction.

Meekly I accepted information about the next steamer sailing for Southampton. Wide-eyed and receptive, I listened to official advice. "You get back to England and enjoy yourself. Buy some more of those big hats I've seen you wearing," said General Scott, feeling kindly. That is the habit of the nicest British officials. They would always rather encourage than oppress. Surreptitiously the A.D.C. offered me a handkerchief. With a final gulp, by this time histrionic, I took it. But my brain was working all out. I would not be deprived of a journey—some journey. Harold Jones must have a film, and I the material for a book.

By the time General Scott shook hands with me, promising me the best cabin on a liner homeward bound, I had thought of Abyssinia. Not even to Philby did I confide so illicit a purpose. All the rest of the day I spent in the bazaar with Moslem friends. They were very good to me. For they remembered the work of Khadija—legendary daughter of Egypt—on behalf of Arab unity.

That night Harold Jones and I were smuggled on board a cargo-boat. The following dawn we disembarked—nameless and unnoticed—in French Somaliland. From there it was simple to make our way over the frontier into Abyssinia. We breathed simultaneous sighs of relief when we reached Harar, in the middle of the Feast of the Arks. Poppy-red, anemone and purple, blossomed the velvet umbrellas of the priests. Like manna upon the hillsides bloomed the tents of pilgrims. Copies of the tablets of Moses were borne in procession. In the dawn, the waters were blessed. Like David before the Ark of the Covenant, the priests of Ethiopia danced. The chieftains were splendid in lions' hides. Spearmen and townsfolk, slaves, monks and nuns all wore the

same spotless white. I thought of Japanese cherry-blossom in the full tide of spring, as I watched the ceremony. But my head was already full of plots. For I had determined on an eleven-hundred-mile journey—by way of Addis Ababa, the capital, to red Lalibela, far north among the mountains of Simyen. If we succeeded in reaching this unbelievable Troglodyte city, forgotten by the West, we would go on across the Nile and the Takkazyc by the old slave route to Gondar, where Portuguese soldiers of fortune had built the loveliest castles in Africa. North again we would make our way to Axum, capital of the ancient sun-worshippers and of the legendary Maqueda, Sheba's queen.

I wanted to see the great monoliths above the altars of sacrifice, whose history has been lost in the birth-pangs of time. I had always loved the legend recorded with much picturesque detail by Arab historians, of the son born to Jewish Solomon and his Ethiopian guest, daughter of the Sun. The story runs that this Hebrew lad fled from Jerusalem, after stealing the Ark of the Covenant from the Holy of Holies in the Temple. Accompanied by a thousand eldest sons from each tribe of Judah, he reached Axum where the living rock opened to receive the Ark. There in Northern Abyssinia, legend has it that this child of Solomon established a Jewish dynasty, ancestors of the royal line which reigns to-day.

It is a historical fact that a Hebrew queen called Judith once ruled over the black-skinned Falasha tribe in the neighbourhood of Axum. But the Ethiopians were converted to Christianity while Britain was still pagan and clothed in woad.

At the time of my Abyssinian journey—in 1926—the Empress Zaiditu occupied the throne of Menelik the Conqueror. The present Negus, Haile Selassie (Holy Trinity), was then Ras Tafari, with the title of Regent. I had sent him a letter from the frontier—hoping that he knew of my activities on behalf of Arabian and African peoples. In quick response, His Highness ordered a local official to travel with us to the capital. It took us three weeks on muleback to cross the tumbled hills and forests—full of long-haired monkeys—and a corner of the savage Dankali desert. We had all sorts of simple adventures. Ghosts and witches in the bodies of hyenas, terrified our superstitious and highly imaginative escort. Quarrels among the muleteers disorganized the caravan. Baggage beasts broke loose at night when attacked by hyenas in their own disagreeable bodies. It took us cross, hot hours to recover them. Clashes with bandits and slave-traders cost us a few wounds. But at last we reached the capital and were told—within the hour—that the Empress wished to see us. I said I must first wash. Jones, unused to riding from dawn to sunset, said he must first sleep. So the audience was arranged for seven next morning.

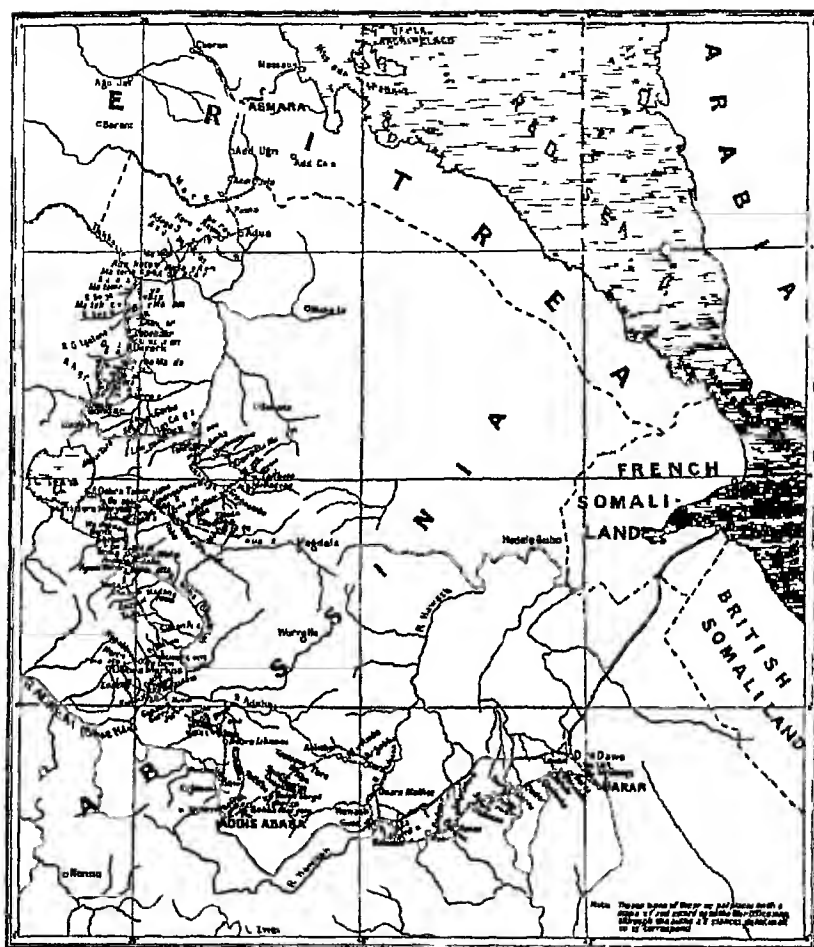
While mist still hid the sun, we rode towards the mud palace set upon a hill speared with blue gum trees. It was a blue world. The huts were damp toadstools among the trees. Men passed us, muffled

to the eyes in their black cloaks. Their mules ran between the blurred trunks, for Addis Ababa was then a forest city. It covered a number of hills and strayed down into the hollows between them. All transport was four-legged. Only slaves went on foot. Debtor and creditor were still chained together or fastened by the knotted ends of their chammas. Corpses occasionally hung above the market stalls. The law insisted that punishment should be in kind. Justice was executed by the nearest of kin. A convicted murderer had to die after the manner in which he had killed. So a child widow might be called upon to slay her husband's assassin with a knife she could hardly hold. A woman's word was inviolate. Without proof, it was accepted in court, but if perjury could subsequently be proved, the woman was forcibly shaved. The local butcher, hastily summoned, made public use of his shears. Clip-clop—off came the tight woolly curls. Butter was rubbed into cuts and the woman turned loose—shamed before the people until she could grow a new head-covering.

The Empress Zaiditu was as simple as her people. She had the high title 'daughter of Menelik, Lion of Judah, Queen of the Kings of Ethiopia', but she was very small, about 4 ft. 4 in., I think. She wore a thick black woollen cloak over the finest white chamma, the end of which was drawn across her mouth. Her great dark eyes stared at us, unblinking above the gauze. She repeated to me what she had told the people at her coronation, "Small I am like Queen Victoria, but great like her I hope to be."

She informed us that she must spend the rest of the day in the kitchen, superintending preparations for a feast. That night she was to entertain ten thousand of her subjects. It was a funeral banquet in memory of the great Menelik's Queen. Carcasses of oxen would be carried round the trestle tables. They would be slung on poles under velvet covers. Each man would use his own knife to cut off as much raw meat as he chose. He would thrust the end of a bleeding strip into his mouth and slice convenient-sized morsels at his lips. It sounded a reckless way of eating, especially when drunk with much *tedj*. This is the 'mead' of the old monks and very potent.

The Empress talked about her difficulties with much frankness, but we spoke through an interpreter who translated the local Amharic into Arabic. It seemed to me then that Zaiditu was the mediator between the priests who represented the ancient world and the Regent urging the claims of the new. Her statecraft was clever. She said in effect, "Let us wait and see if this new thing does not turn out to be good." So she was regarded as a champion of tradition while approving much of Ras Tafari's evolutionary programme. Occasionally the modernists tried to assassinate her. But she was never criticized. Lonely, aloof, pathetic, her state and dignity dependent on gold, rich stuffs and lion hides against a background of mud walls and blue gum trees, she was a diminishing power in Abyssinia. But she was still obstinate. Even



# THE ABYSSINIAN JOURNEY

the Itcheque—leader of the feudal traditionalists—could not change her mind. She ruled herself with more austerity than her people, yet she was the representative of a system based on slavery and maintained by force.

This perhaps has not been sufficiently recognized. The 'black Christian empire', 'the last independent native state' in Africa, fighting against Italy for her existence, appealed to us all in England because, as sentimentalists, we are always on the side of the under-dog. But—apart from the League of Nations aspect—there was no basis of fact for our furious indignation. The 'Christian empire' consisted of the rule, imposed as late as 1896, by the armed Amhara tribe under the great warrior chieftain Menelik upon the mass of pagan Abyssinians—ignorant, unwilling and outraged, whose spearmen were enslaved, their women turned into concubines, and their children seized for the households of their masters. It is a lovely story—that tale of three thousand years, in unbroken line from Solomon, but it is not history. Before the conquests of Menelik, Abyssinia was a chaotic accumulation of tribes and small, warring kingdoms. Reigning houses rose and fell. At one time the Moslem Emirs of Harar predominated. Against them, in the seventeenth century, Portuguese soldiers of fortune fought beside the Kings of Gondar. In other ages, Simyen or Lasta, red Lalibela with its forgotten language of Geze, or the Hebrew Falasha were the strongest influence in the land. There was—in no period of history—either peace or prosperity. The only civilized element, apart from the Portuguese, were the Jesuit missions which travelled between the court of Byzantium and whichever town was at the moment held by a Negus. For Islam could not be converted to Christianity. The Jesuits could only hope to reap what they sowed in Amharan soil. And these people, the ruling tribe to-day, are not Christians in the European sense of the word. They are bastard Copts who combine Mariolatry and every form of superstition with a curious theatrical mixture comprising Jewish and Catholic doctrine. The only time in my life I have been tempted to atheism is among the Abyssinian mountains, where there is a church on every peak, a lie on every tongue, greed and cowardice in every heart, holy pictures, concubinage and slavery in every filthy hovel.

## CHAPTER XV

1926

### *Further into Abyssinia*

RAS TAFARI RECEIVED US with the greatest kindness in Addis Ababa. He entertained us in European fashion. There were gold-mounted menus

at his dinner parties, gold plate and electric light. We drank champagne out of Venetian glass. The white 'chammas'<sup>1</sup> of a host of servants contrasted with the embroidered lion skins of the Abyssinian guests. We talked about the country—in French. "The people are astoundingly self-sufficient," I said. This was my chief impression after weeks of conversation with muleteers and soldiers, with villagers and headmen and the officials who rode with us—for their own safety.

Ras Tafari replied, "We need European progress only because we are surrounded by it. That is at once a benefit and a misfortune. Your civilization would expedite our development, but we do not want to be smothered by it." As a matter of course we talked about the slave trade, which the Regent was doing his best to suppress. "It is not a popular move," he explained. "For as yet we have no free labour. The whole country depends on the work of slaves, or serfs. They are treated much like the other members of the household and—by a recent edict—they are set free on the deaths of their masters." Ras Tafari looked troubled. He repeated, "The great people do not like this. Indeed no Habashi likes change."

I thought the Regent had great charm, but he seemed to me a clever politician rather than a statesman. He had travelled a certain amount, but his brain was of the traditional Ethiopian pattern. Generous and hospitable, of proven personal courage, he was too fond of compromise and intrigue to be a popular leader. Above all he needed that which he could not admit—European tutelage. In most of my travels, my sympathies have been with the native races, conscious of inferiority, real or imaginary, faithfully struggling towards self-expression in the form of nationalism. But Abyssinia, as I saw it, needed more experienced rule than Negus or Emir or Ras could provide. Any European suzerainty would have been better for the country than the combination of ignorance, savagery, slavery and corruption with which we became familiar as we travelled North.

Ras Tafari said to us, in the Arabic which he preferred to French, "The Abyssinian likes his own way. He will not recognize any other."

"I noticed that none of your officers asked what we thought of the country," I remarked.

"They do not want to know," said His Highness. "They are not interested in foreign opinion, foreign affairs or foreign methods. They want to be left alone to live as their fathers and grandfathers. They do not want to be improved. They have too good an opinion of themselves to think it necessary." The Regent smiled. He has great dignity, but he does not always say either what he thinks—or means. Words, with him, are often an admirable method of concealing his thoughts.

<sup>1</sup> Shawls worn by Christian Abyssinians.



At that time Abyssinia was split into more or less autonomous provinces, governed by great feudal chiefs with the title of Ras. They appointed their own officers and officials—Djczmatches, Feteraris and Ballambarassis. They maintained their own armies. The Regent's writ with which we travelled North had no value when the capital was out of reach. Each village tried to levy toll on passing caravans. Headmen as well as chieftains fought their neighbours. The ravines held as many brigands as baboons. If the great rivers were full of crocodiles, which made passage hideous, the mountains held equal danger in the bands of freed slaves who, with no means of earning a living—except by their rifles—preyed upon travellers.

We left Addis Ababa with the blessing of the Regent and of the British Minister, Mr. Russell, who had begun by being resigned to my intentions and ended by furthering them—because he wanted a route report of the unknown North. We had about twenty-five mules, some of which were stolen on the way, a white stallion—astride which Jones used to say, "I have to keep looking round to see I am still there"—and a wild young chestnut which I rode. A number of muleteers, called 'nagadis', looked after—and lost—our beasts. A cook called Gabra Gorgis fed us, at times quite well. Our first interpreter took to drink and died of heat apoplexy. Our second, a Moslem called Hassen, was a delightful contrast to our lazy, though sometimes amusing Abyssinian Copts. He was faithful and grave. He put no undue value on money. We respected each other and have remained friends. Besides all these, we had to hire 'zabaniers', who are soldiers of fortune, to guard the caravan. These brought their own rifles and asked for ammunition in payment of their services. They fed on 'derga'—the hospitality which should legally be offered by every village to a traveller with the Regent's seal. For gratuity they wanted salt. As I had to pay my porters £2 a month to carry 18/- worth of purchasing power in the shape of six bars of salt—the usual load—the situation had its difficulties.

Looking back, I think that journey in the spring of 1926 from Addis Ababa to Italian Eritrea was the most wearing I have ever done. I can remember no moment of peace. We were always struggling to cross a flooded river, to climb a precipice, or to get safely off a mountain which showed every intention of slipping down with us. The caravan was always in a panic—about ghosts, brigands, baboons, crocodiles, 'haunts', lost beasts, rifles which would not 'act' or which 'acted' at the wrong moment, sore backs under the atrocious pack-saddles, sore feet, no food, no drink or too much of both. For when a great Chieftain entertained us, every Abyssinian got drunk on tedj—the mead of the old monasteries—or he gorged himself on raw meat followed by such violent purges that he could not move for twenty-four hours.

Our worst troubles were our guides. They never knew the way.

Sometimes we had a dozen in one day and lost ourselves at the end of it.

There was always a ridiculous side to our adventures. I remember one hot afternoon, stumbling down from a particularly vindictive ridge and being warned by Alto Belacho, the head 'nagadi', that we were entering a 'bad district'. His assistant Woldo Sclassi begged me to 'march quickly'. As they were always equally divided between worry and fear, I did not pay much attention. At the first village the headman—called a Feterari—came out to meet us with a crowd of tattered riflemen. Demanding a large sum of Maria Theresa dollars, or several loads of salt, he assured us with so much insistence, "If you walk for four days you will still be in my property," that I guessed this was the last 'gate' of his province.

"One more effort," I said to Jones, but our followers were more putty-like than usual. They made a vague attempt to hurry the mules. The Feterari's men beat them back with their rifle-butts. Then only Woldo Sclassi and the cook joined Jones in rounding up the frightened animals, while I reiterated the arguments of months to the Feterari Makonnen. He disputed our right to proceed at all. I insisted. Soon both of us were as obstinate as the mules. At the end of the first hour, the headman knew he was not going to get any bakshcsh. He guessed he had made a fool of himself and feared he might have to answer to the governor—or to mightier, if vaguer, powers above him—for all these unpleasantnesses, but he meant that we should pay. I was equally determined not to spend two or three days as semi-prisoners in a very dirty village while 'zabaniers' and 'nagadis' drank themselves quarrelsome and every evil-smelling pest from beggars to bugs swarmed in our tents.

It was obvious that with two revolvers and the groom's rifle we could not rescue the luggage from the score of soldiers who had taken possession of it—the more grimly because even our own men did not intend to walk further that day on any pretext. I felt it was time to play my last card.

"Very well. I can't help you stealing my luggage, but you daren't stop me. Come along, Jones. We'll go on."

The Feterari expostulated. "You can't go alone. You will die on the mountain. There are hyenas and many robbers."

Hassen saw no reason why he should be excluded from the melodrama. "We will all go with her," he announced. "We will walk till we die."

Makonnen scratched his head with the end of a six-foot cane.

"What a violent woman!" he said. "I have never seen anyone so hard. One would think she were a man, if it were not for her face."

By this time two men were holding my bridle, so I dismounted, took off my water-bottle, called to the cook, Gabra Gorgis, to bring the bag of rice, and, fingering the holster of my revolver, marched off. In

front of me was a line of the Feterari's riflemen, and for a second of regained humour I wondered if they would let me pass. If not, I should have to shoot or stop. I realized that to do either would be ridiculous. Jones was following, his haversack slung across his shoulders. Unfortunately, this artistic touch was rather spoiled by Woldo Selassi, who had thoughtfully removed the torn and very grubby pillow which I had wedged between the bars of my saddle and was stalking after us in a trail of feathers. The rear was brought up by Hassen, who, as usual, in moments of emotion, was wet-eyed, hatless and gesticulating. Gabra Gorgis hugged a bundle consisting of a sleeping-helmet—the temperature must have been well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit—a cone of sugar and a lidless kettle. Fortunately, the Feterari's riflemen were as impressed as Hassen by the pathos of the process. I had to avoid Jones's eye and remember myself laughing at our ludicrous appearance, but the soldiers gave way. Without a glance at the Feterari, Jones and I stalked off, attended by the muttering Hassen, who suddenly doubled back to fetch a woollen scarf and to reiterate to the embarrassed Makonnen, "She will fall over the rocks. We shall all be hung. We have no lamp. There are wild beasts and wild men. She never stops. You will be put in chains. I lost my hat. No blanket. Very cold—we freeze. If she die, we all lost. No water in the bottles and so hot we have thirst. We lose the way and all die," till the Feterari, bewildered by the variety and extent of disaster which threatened us, caught us up.

"You cannot go," he said, with eyes lowered. "If you do not stop, my men will hold you."

We took no notice of this threat, but a clamour from the rear alarmed us. Atto Belacho had unslung his gun, and the 'zabaniers' were preparing to back him up.

"There will be war," moaned Hassen. "We shall be killed before we die on the rocks. My blanket is lost for two days."

I was too cross to care what happened, but I remarked to Jones that I was afraid our last card had failed.

"I won't go back," he said desperately. "Can't you do anything? Shoot the brute or"—he had an inspiration—"cry! That's it. Try crying."

I looked at him doubtfully, then at Hassen, who muttered, "He very bad man. Dreadful. The water is in my eyes."

I pulled out an enormous red handkerchief which I used to put under my hat when the sun was ruthless. Burying my face in it, I wept. At first it was a histrionic effort, and the amazement on the face of Woldo Selassi nearly turned it into laughter, but, as I remembered how much my feet ached and how much time we had lost, I managed to squeeze a little moisture out of my eyes. A minute more and I was sobbing whole-heartedly.

The effect on the Feterari was as unexpected as it was rapid. I have never seen a man more uncomfortable. Without looking at us, eyes fixed on the ground, he signalled me on.

"Go on!" he urged. "I will send your luggage. Only do not cry."

But I was too suspicious of such easy success, and too doubtful of being able to start again, to stop so quickly. With the handkerchief as a mask, I walked on, conscious of the caravan clattering after me. Fortunately for the realism of my tears, I was not aware that Hassen was also weeping in a choky, unrestrained fashion which tried Jones beyond endurance.

The path tumbled off the ledge in a slither of loose stones just as I exploded, "I think you are most unsympathetic. Here have I saved you three days in the midst of that mess and given myself a headache and spoiled my only clean handkerchief, and you laugh."

"Do look at Hassen!" retorted Jones. "He's doing it ever so much better than you. Did you ever see such drops?"

For two hours we plodded down the mountain, choked in dust. We camped when it was quite dark and Atto Belacho could no longer make those long grasshopper leaps of his, counting the mules. "One, two, three, and the grey one; five, six, where is the one-eared wretch? Six, seven, Mary help me, I have forgotten! One, two, Woldo Gorgis is it the new mule you have with you, or that man Balaina?"

There was a crop of six-foot thistles on a shelf tip-tilted over the valley. Among the prickles we pitched our tents, and spent the first part of the night looking for our various possessions, flattening spaces on which to balance them, and pulling spikes out of everything. There was no water, so we could not eat.

"Victory is sweet," said Jones, "but two aspirin tablets are an insufficient dinner. Do you think I could kill a roosting guinea-fowl with a revolver?"

I implored him not to try. "They always say one sleeps better when one is hungry," I added.

In our case the adage proved untrue, for baboons barked at us in the few intervals when hyenas and 'nagadis' ceased their concert. In the lull before the dawn the mules, tired of their thistle couch, wandered over our tent-ropes, and broke two before crashing onwards into the bush. At last I must have slept, for the next thing I heard was Jones's morning cry.

"Hassen, get the 'zabaniers' up!"

"Yes," intoned the interpreter as usual, but perhaps there was a curious note in his affirmative, or else the camp was unnaturally still.

"Tell the 'nagadis' to get the pack-saddles on. I want to start," I shouted.

There was a pause. Then, "And how would you start when there are no mules?" came mildly from Hassen.

"No mules!"

"No. They have all gone!"

Obsessed by suspicions of the Feterari, who had haunted my dreams, I burst out of my tent, one boot on, the other in my hand. The thistles welcomed me and further conversation was conducted while I hopped round clutching a foot which resembled a hedgehog.

"Who has taken the mules? Have they been stolen—or——"

I wondered how I could frame my conviction of a plot. Hassen was gently futile.

"All run away, perhaps want water, or else bad men take. This not Amhara country. All wild peoples. Take everything and kill you for a few salts."

By this time I had observed some dark shapes looming amidst the bush.

"I can see just a few mules," I said.

"All dead ones," returned Hassen.

"Well, they'll have to walk to-day. We'll take just the tents and flea-bags and Mr. Jones's tins. Gabra Gorgis will have to do with one of his boxes—the rest we'll leave behind."

"There are no riding-mules," said Hassen, with the monotony of a Greek chorus.

Attributing every obstacle to the machinations of the wily Makonnen and determined to circumvent them, I retorted, "What does that matter? We can walk."

"Yes," acquiesced Hassen dolefully, "but how will you manage the loading, for there are no 'zabaniers'?"

"What?"

"They have all gone with Atto Belacho to look for the mules."

"Which way did they go?"

Hassen waved hands and chin upwards in the direction of our enemy's territory.

"That settles it," I said. "We'll start at once."

We got the tents down and the beds rolled up rather quicker than usual, but, when it came to loading even a 'dead' mule, our difficulties began. Gabra Gorgis was most helpful, though his instructions, given while he hung on to the lower lip of one furious animal, held another by the mane and kicked ropes about with his feet, were so numerous and divergent that we found it difficult to follow them. Balaina, naturally, got bitten at once. Hassen wandered around, feebly pulling any loose ends and murmuring, "I don't think that right way."

Fortunately, while we were struggling with a mule which seemed to have the expanding and contracting powers of a concertina, shouts came from above. The mules had been found! Gabra Gorgis shrilled back a series of questions and, from mountain crest to valley, the extraordinary carrying power of Abyssinian screams informed us that the beasts had strayed in search of water and had been recovered at a mud-hole a couple of miles up the cliff.

"I thought you were overdoing the Feterari a bit," remarked Jones with as little grammar as tact. He made up for it by confessing his own idea.

"I imagined the 'nagadis' were sick with us for going on so long yesterday, and it was a wheeze to get an easy march to-day. I thought they'd just driven the animals into the bush and were roosting comfortably under some tree down there." He pointed to the thickets below us.

"Too many prickles," I said ruefully.

Such nights and days—brigand panics among the cowardly 'zabaniers', ghost panics among the 'nagadis', fights with words or guns—all these were common during the long journey from Addis Ababa to Italian Eritrea.

The Chocha provided us with experience of a different kind. It is an extraordinary peninsula of mountain shaped like an octopus, where a fox-like people live underground. We all thought it an uncanny land. For on every tilted ledge a few goats or cattle browsed. On each wind-swept ridge grass was mown or millet lay drying. Yet there was no sign of a hut or a human being. Hundreds of monkeys, prowling through the stubble, barked at us as we passed.

"Perhaps it is they who work the farms," suggested a frightened muleteer. "Grain on all sides—but no houses, no people!" muttered Atto Belacho. "It is accursed ground." Scurrying from one mule to another, he urged them to make a last effort. "If we have to sleep in the Chocha, we shall never wake again!" he urged.

I have never met people with as many terrors as the Christian Abyssinians. If we had not been accompanied by a few Moslem riflemen with Arab blood in their veins, I do not think we should ever have got to Eritrea.

In the dusk, that night, we reached the ruins of a lonely church, girt with trees. There I insisted on camping, for the pack animals could not go further. Improvident as the Children of Israel, soldiers and muleteers had emptied their water-bottles during the midday heat. Jones and I had to give them our own ration, contenting ourselves with a few spoonfuls of goats' milk.

While we smoked and tried to pretend we were not thirsty, a quaint figure in high white turban and leather cape appeared on the opposite slope. In moonlight and through the high grass, he looked unreal and I was not sure I had not imagined him till I saw the flicker of fire. The man would not answer our hail and, before we could reach him, he stamped out the flame and disappeared.

At that moment Hassen, who had been foraging, stumped out of the shadows with a sack of 'shimbura'<sup>1</sup> for the mules. "Did you steal it?" I asked. "Or did you find a house?"

"There are no houses here," he replied. "I saw a man sitting by

<sup>1</sup> A small grain like millet.

a fire in the open. I asked him 'Where is your hut?' He would not answer. Many times I questioned him. Then he say 'Far away', and not speak again. So I give him a handful of bullets and he let me take the 'shimbura', but he never look at me."

"I will give you anything you want, if you'll go back and ask where there is water."

Hassen—who was afraid of nothing human—shivered. "I dare not," he said.

By this time we were nearing our goal. Red Lalibela was always "just over the next mountain". The Jesuit Father Alvarez, who in 1520 accompanied the Portuguese mission to Abyssinia, was the first European to see the amazing troglodyte churches hewn out of the rock, their courts open to the sky and joined by subterranean passages. The priest wrote a long description for the benefit of Rome, but he realized how unlikely it was that the mediaeval world would believe in such incomparable marvels. So he added, "It wearies me to write more of these works, because it seems to me that they will not believe me . . . and because as to what I have written, they may accuse me of untruth, therefore I swear by God, in whose power I am, that all that is written is the truth, and there is much more than what I have written, and I have left it that they may not tax me with falsehood."

The rock churches of Lalibela are generally attributed to a king of the same name who reigned at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries, but legend and the belief of priests and people accord them a date seven hundred years earlier. According to some authorities, Lalibela had an Arab wife, whom he married while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. On his return he brought with him several hundred Palestinian workmen. To these he entrusted the construction of the rock churches, whose site had been revealed in a vision. The priests, however, possess manuscripts written in Geze and Arabic mixed, which, if accurate, would show that troglodyte buildings of a much earlier date already existed at Lalibela.

In some accounts the six hundred workmen were Egyptian, not Arab. But all the local records agree that the labour of hewing the great monolith blocks out of the earth and the carving of windows, doors, arches, aisles and columns from solid rock was too much for human beings. So every night, while sculptors and masons slept, a legion of angels took up their tools and continued the work through the darkness. Consequently every morning the workmen found some mighty column added to a façade or some new court begun. For years the hosts of heaven and the strangers from Nile or Jordan worked in turn. Thus by sunlight and by starlight church after church grew to completion—monolith blocks, each carved out of a single mass of stone, not below, but level with the surface of the ground.

Each court is a great oblong pit, some forty feet deep. In the centre is the church, its bulk of line giving it a stateliness emphasized by the

bold simplicity of carving and ornament. The ground immediately around the churches is enclosed by a cane fence, and the priests' huts creep right up to the edge of the sunken courts, which are sometimes joined one to the other by low tunnels, through which a man cannot walk upright. The natural walls between two such quarries are fifteen to thirty feet thick. Standing on the top of one, it is possible to get an impression of the labour expended on this labyrinth of excavated corridor and court, church, porch and colonnade, and to compare the signs of different periods and schools of workmanship.

The two finest churches are, I think, the colossal Medane Alem and Mariam, separated only by a great bastion which is pierced by one of the tunnels which look like rabbit-holes.

With a lack of logic truly Abyssinian, only men are allowed to enter Mariam, the church of the Virgin.

"Why do you exclude women from the one church dedicated to a woman?" I asked the chief priest, who was attended by an acolyte with a fly-whisk.

"It is the rule," he said.

"What would happen if Mary appeared on earth and wanted to enter her own house?"

The man of learning laughed. "That is a very good joke! We should know her, of course," he answered, with the simplicity of a child.

From Lalibela we took a short cut to Gondar. It was a mistake. There was not even a slaver's track among the mountains into which we plunged. Jones was doubtful whether a map, unpromisingly blank whenever we most needed its help, a compass and a guide full of charm but evasive as to names and distances, were sufficient to get us across a hundred and forty miles of officially routeless mountain and valley to Gondar.

"I could not bear to go back to the Chocha," I urged. "It's a certain nine days that way; whereas this——"

"May be twenty," muttered Hassen. "The last man in the village said so."

"Only because he wanted more money," I insisted. "In any case it's a new way and full of possibilities."

"You love new things, don't you?" said Jones. "Well, I hope my tobacco will last out, and what exactly are the possibilities of getting anywhere to-night?"

"Oh, to-day is dull—there is a track marked as far as Dembeta Mariam. Does the guide happen to know it?"

We had sent the caravan on ahead. The youth who was to guide us till we caught up with it showed no hesitation.

All that day we hurried after our mules, but the 'nagadi' had fitted them with seven-leagued boots so that everyone we met assured us, "Au. I have seen them—far, very far in front." The country



alternated between rock and scrub, with no stretch flat enough to plough. We hurried through a blazing hot noon, striped with the flash of hoopoes' wings or the gleam of golden orioles. The sunset came as, breathless and parched, we climbed an immense ridge which seemed to tear the sky with its palisade of thorns.

"There is a village half-way up," said our boy guide. "The 'nagadi' will never pass that." But he did! The twilight saw a chase, grim now, lest darkness catch us on the rocks. Jones's mule gave out half a mile before the summit. I pushed mine ahead.

"If there's no flat space on top, we're done," I said. "Heaven knows where Atto Belacho has gone; in any case, it'll be too dark to follow."

With bursting sides, my mule heaved himself over the last boulders.

"Jones!" I shrieked. "It's all right. I've seen a dog's tail!"

The next moment I saw the whole animal, obvious guardian of a village. It turned to hark at me. A hundred yards away were three clusters of huts and in a hollow between them, our tents were already going up.

"You told me to go to Dembeta," said the 'nagadi' triumphantly. "I remember the name, so I came here!"

Of course the 'chum' was away. The headmen of Northern Abyssinia seem gifted with a sixth sense which warns them of the approach of any traveller, having the right of 'dergo', and they go to ground like rabbits.

"Where is his house?" we demanded.

"Oh, very far away!"

"His deputy, then?"

"He has gone on a long journey," or "he is in Addis Ababa," are the two regular answers to the last question, but Dembeta wanted to make sure.

"Dead," they said blandly.

"Well, will you sell us a little barley?"

This they were reluctant to do, knowing that they should have given it as tax, but after an hour's arguing and several journeys to the various hovels, we collected a sackful of different grains. A widow, with head so closely shaven that it made one ache to look at it, sold us a chicken the size of a starling for a bullet.

"She oughtn't to lose all hope of another husband," snorted Gabra Gorgis, after he had exhausted his contempt for such sharp practice. It is only the old women wrinkled into pleated bags who shave their hair as a sign of permanent mourning, for husbands are easily replaced in Abyssinia. Most women have made trial of several.

The journey continued with endless repetition of such incidents and such conversations. We always hoped for paths. Often we were promised a road. Rarely did we find even a goat's track. My white horse had to be sold. He was terrified of the narrow ridges. I received

the munificent sum of 18s. for him and for the chestnut mare, too flighty for tight-rope walking among the passes.

A hamlet called Berkwakwa sent us on our way with grave warnings of robbers. As we passed the next House of Christians—I forget whether it was Mary or George—two ill-conditioned creatures, armed with rifles, pattered after us.

"We have come to save you from the brigands on this bad road," they said. "There is a band near the Takkazye river who have seventy-two rifles."

Jones removed his pipe with an air of meditation.

"I should think if we take these fellows along, they'll have seventy-four," he said.

Agreeing, I got rid of our proposed defenders by the simple expedient of telling them I had no money with me.

We met no robbers, but my impressions of that red-hot day were mountains of loose stones, pinned together with thorns. Jones expressed it more succinctly in one word, "Hell." Under a torrid sun, we laboured, with automatic regularity, down one wracking chute of stones and up another. I could not walk, because of a torn and swollen toe. Not only my boots, which a 'zabanier' had mended by combining two pairs into one, but the pommel of the saddle and the reins were hot to touch. The thorns were a curtain a foot or two above saddle level.

My leather coat gave at last. My gloves had become mittens. My hat was torn across the crown. The handkerchief I had stuck under it as some protection against the sun was a fringe, while breeches and boots were like pin-cushions. Eyes seared, skins caked with dust and sweat, we came to a piece of flat mud with a few houses above it. I looked round for a clean spot and saw none. So I lay down where there were fewest stones, and was conscious of nothing but a fusion of different aches, till the first mules of the caravan walked over me. They looked like the scarred and battered veterans of battle. There was no piece of luggage intact except Jones's film-cases. The flea-bags were ripped at the ends. The sacks which held the tents gaped as if after a careless operation. One suit-case was smashed, the lock of another gone, while the cover of the medicine-chest was in tatters. The cook's boxes had become a collection of strips barely held together with rope.

The retinue needed almost as much mending as the luggage. Once again we washed, anointed, tidied and ministered to aches in shaken middles. Then Jones mended the worst tear in his tent with a cross of sticking-plaster. Hassen pulled thorns out of everyone with my pincers. Gabra Gorgis turned several boxes into one. The cobbler exhausted his thread on the least damaged cases and covers. The sticks of our pagoda umbrellas were repaired with splints made of pencils. My watch-glass and Jones's sun-glasses were mended with sticking-

paper, and most of the glass was picked out of the purée of jam, coffee and powdered macaroni.

That night there was a full moon. All the hills were sapphires set in silver, till flame scarred the blueness with point after rippling point. First there was a scarlet pagoda outlined on a distant mountain. Then the lines blurred into a great beacon which blazed half the night and challenged the white heat of the moonlight.

The peasants were burning the scrub to enrich the land which yielded them so poor return, but Gabra Gorgis, always terrified of robbers, insisted that it was a signal. We took counsel of the 'nagadis', for Atto Belacho was hard-headed.

"There certainly are robbers," he said. "And the caravan should keep together. They will not attack it if they see Europeans with it, for they know the Government would make a war."

"They will not wait to find out," said a 'zabanier', "for no Europeans come this road, so let us make ready."

We loaded extra revolvers for ourselves. We armed the groom and Balaina and told them not to shoot at anything but a hall-marked brigand. We ordered that all rifles should be carried by the men who had the ammunition. Generally these were far ahead, without arms. In the morning everyone looked like a Wild West show at Olympia.

"How do you feel?" asked Jones, as I hobbled out of my tent.

I thought for a minute, as I chose the least damaged egg and encouraged a five-inch locust with red wings, to get out of the honey.

"The shreds of my last stockings are knotted round my feet and I feel like an ant crawling out of a dynamo."

"As bad as that! I had to shout three times before I could wake you this morning. By the way, Gabra Gorgis doesn't want to carry a revolver—he says it might 'act' in his pocket."

"He'd certainly fall off if anything 'acted' within a mile of him," I said bitterly—the locust had left bits of himself in the last of the honey and the saddle-cloth which for weeks had interposed its wadding between my bones and the hardness of my Abyssinian saddle was a shredded mass.

While I was studying the effect of Gabra Gorgis's patchwork boxes, from which handles and spouts protruded in unexpected places, a crowd gathered in search of medicine. They brought a little milk in gourds, apologizing for the meagre supply because the land was dry, and they exposed leprous sores. A child had two small bones sticking out of the back of its head and other worse things. I thought the dryness of which they complained, acting as cautery and disinfectant combined, was more useful than amateur doctoring was likely to be.

"Does it hurt much?" I asked the boy with the exposed skull.

"Not when the moon is full," answered his mother. "But when there is a young moon, it itches."

The others agreed that at the beginning or end of the lunar month their sufferings increased. There was a funny case of a small imp with a pain in his middle, for which I was about to administer the obvious remedy, when his older brother explained that he had caught a young bird and eaten it alive.

"He did not chew it properly," he said, moving his jaws expressively, "and the creature is still alive inside him. It is the beak he feels tapping."

We agreed that this was most unfortunate. Hassen delivered a lecture, not on cruelty, but on economy, since young partridges can be encouraged to grow into large fat ones, if not prematurely devoured.

Slowly we toiled down towards the old, elusive Takkazye River, which hid its ribbon of water between cliffs and twisted thorn thickets. It was a terrible land, older in parched greyness than anything I have seen except the gum bush in Australia. Rocks and strange shrivelled trees looked as if they were the rags of time, wrung in the mangle of drought, shrunk and discoloured by the sun. The grass was colourless, and the whole country sapless and bleached. The trees, bent and groping towards the earth with a mass of tortured tendons, might have provided the inspiration for one of those wonderful, gnarled drawings of Rackham's. The people, as bloodless and wrinkled as the rocks which burned the cracked leather of their skins, were scantily wrapped in hides. Hair, faces, eyes had a curiously leaden look, by reason of the dust which caked them. We sat on a rock that must have been the lid of some infernal oven, and ate a chicken wing which in texture and taste resembled dry bark. I noticed that every one of my nails was split.

Then we shepherded the caravan down the last rocky chute, pulled thorns out of everyone, and suggested an immediate crossing of the deliciously cool, green water. There was a chorus of protest. The guide had seized a fowl, tied comfortably in the hollow between two film-cases. It represented the certainty of supper, should we find no village on our way. But the man wrenched it free and was just going to throw it into the river, when I seized his arm.

"Has he gone mad?" I asked Hassen.

"No, no," muttered our interpreter. "He must drown it." With no further explanation he became involved in the verbal battle. So I had to appeal to Gabra Gorgis. From him I learned that it was a custom, when crossing the Takkazye, to sacrifice a chicken either to the ancient gods, or perhaps to the crocodiles.

"But there's hardly enough water to cover a trout, let alone anything dangerous," I protested. "You don't want to sacrifice my dinner each time I wade through a puddle."

Gabra Gorgis was doubtful. He shrugged his shoulders and spoke of "these ignorant people", but was obviously relieved when, as the sole method of inducing the 'nagadis' to proceed, I agreed to give

up the fowl on condition that it was killed before it was thrown into the water.

On the thirtieth day after leaving Addis Ababa we came to Gondar.

Under the walls of Fasil's palace we passed two great sycamores. One was the tree of Justice, the other the scaffold from whose branches hung human fruit.

"I've found a splendid place for a camp. Inside here! Through the arch," shouted Jones. We rode into what must once have been the main court of the twin palaces on the hill.

"What luck to camp right against your background!" continued Jones, stiffness and scars forgotten as he seized his camera and clambered to the nearest point of vantage.

Aesthetically, Gondar was delightful. It was a world of ruins, half veiled in sugar-cane and flowering shrubs. Out of a maze of fallen walls, with towers, pillars and broken domes scattered about them, rose two massive Moorish castles.<sup>1</sup> They were pale golden, from their cupolas and the ramparts which ran along their roofs between arches, carved and exquisite, to the great flights of steps, curving up to the first stories, where the windows were like the entrances to cathedral aisles.

Practically, Gondar was unsatisfactory. Whenever our caravan had eaten too much of our sugar, coffee or rice they assured us there was an Indian in Gondar from whom I could buy everything. With this, Jones and I had comforted ourselves when we had to limit our own sugar to an almost invisible pinch in each cup. But of course the Indian was imaginary.

The only things we could buy were the local mixture of coffee and strong spices, honey, onions and bitter native flour. To pay for these—when our salts and bullets were finished—Woldo Gorgis offered me some mysterious little bundles which he kept tied up in rags in his pocket. They contained fragments of incense, a square inch of kohl, and a few dozen large seeds, from which women grind oil for their hair—but their purchasing power was immense. As soon as it was known I possessed such aids to beauty, the camp was surrounded by "pretty ladies" offering chickens and eggs in exchange for the temporary renewal of their charms. These were not very obvious, for the women had a cowed expression unusual in an African daughter of joy.

From Gondar we rode over the highest passes in the North to Axum, the Queen of Sheba's capital. There we pitched camp under the rocks miraculously cleft for the passage of Solomon's son. A score of imps, half-naked, clustered on the crest and shrilled their comments like starlings in a chimney. Balaina's whine ran through the falsetto chaffering of Gabra Gorgis. The mules rolled in the dust and bit their sore backs within a foot or two of the dish wherein the 'zabaniers' made their bread. A mist of smoke rose over the hovels, transforming them into fungus round the feet of those slender age-old pillars.

<sup>1</sup> Built in 1640 by Portuguese mercenaries for King Fasil of Shoa.



1 In Santos, Brazil, three discerned journalists  
and the Arthur McGraths 2 Night out with the  
Chicago flying squad 3 Miss Forbes all you re  
registering is plain boredom!

# THE GREEN BAY TREE OF PUBLICITY



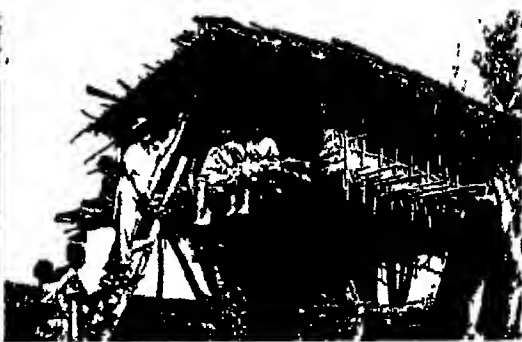
P & A Photos





1 Off from the Lido 2 With the "good snakes" at Butantim, Brazil, where venom is extracted for serum 3 With Jane at Kaieteur Fall, in British Guiana 4 Bouquets and beauty, in private train, Argentine 5 Rosita Forbes in camp—with torn sleeve 6 On the steps of a tree-house, in Travancore

#### ADVENTURE GRAVE AND GAY



I tried to catch the glamour of history and legend as in the ruined palaces of Gondar, as in rose-red Lalibela, but it eluded me. A dog ran through the tent-ropes carrying a dusty sheep's head. Some men with rifles were arguing with a couple of boil-covered beggars who had tied together their rags in sign of a dispute which they desired to make public. A lame horse, with back and quarters in ribbons, hobbled into view.

"You dogs and sons of thieves!" shrieked Gabra Gorgis. "Is it a Christian who would offer me two chickens that are but feathers stuffed with bones, and eggs black from last year's fast, for a dollar!"

Then a boy came up to me. Tall and wide-eyed and frank, he spoke to me gently, holding something in the corner of his 'chamma'.

"I have brought you a present, because they say you have come a very long way."

I looked up, surprised. With care, he unfolded a minute object and offered it on his outstretched palm. It was a tiny copper coin, smaller than a farthing, worn and green with age. Himyaritic, I thought, but perhaps Sabaeen.

"It is very old," said the boy. "I found it up there in the hills, but I have no learning to appreciate it."

I thanked him and offered him money, but he smiled as he threw the end of his wrap over his shoulder.

"No, it is a gift, and may Mary bless your feet."

His bow was so swift that his head had brushed my skirt and he was off again, chin up, long cane swinging, before I could reply. For a moment I stood looking at the fragment of metal engraved and moulded as much by time as by the coiners of fourteen hundred years ago.

Now the smoke hid the huts altogether, and in the damp air it writhed into phantom hosts. There was a lull about the camp. From a far-off monastery came the rhythm of chanted psalms. The monoliths were pinnacles of mystery piercing the storm-darkened sunset, while the song of David, grandfather of the son of Solomon, who first reigned in Axum, drifted through the whorls of mist, as the breath of battle music before a regiment of ghosts.

"I have bought a goat," said Gabra Gorgis suddenly in my ear. "I think it is sick, because of the look in its eyes, which are shut, but I will it kill quickly before it dies, and make a good soup."

From Axum, where the great monoliths face the rising sun, we marched across the wild stony hills that have twice been the battleground of Italy and Abyssinia. We passed Fremona, where the old world died in the tomb of Maqueda, legendary Queen of Sheba. She had a club foot and went to see the 'Hakim'—the learned doctor Solomon, King in Jerusalem—hoping to cure her deformity. The new world was born when, in A.D. 600, Bishop Frumentius built the first Christian church in Abyssinia on that same hill.



At Adowa, we stayed with the Italian Consul, Commendatore Pollero, author of a remarkable work on Ethiopian women. Next day we rode to Mareb, the river boundary of Eritrea, and it took the caravan ten and a half hours to do the twenty-one miles. We went ahead on mules loaned by the hospitable consul, and finding a flock of goats, paid a bullet to a naked imp for the privilege of milking them. I never knew goats could be so deceptive. We turned the 'zabaniers' loose among the elusive animals, and they returned, dragging the fattest matrons behind them, but none provided us with more than a few spoonfuls of milk. It took four people an hour's hard and hot work to fill one bottle.

At Mareb we were welcomed by a guard of Italian askari, in tall red fezes.

"There are many robbers here, so the Dejezmach Mangasha sent us to look after you," said the sergeant in admirable Italian. They did it most effectively. In two minutes they had cleared the ground for our tents, brought wood and water and hustled off in search of fodder.

"There are also eggs, lady, and twelve chickens, which the Dejezmach Mangasha has sent for your dinner."

Jones looked at the squawking bunch with disgust. "The eighty-second," he murmured, but I remembered the lean days and was appropriately grateful.

Accompanied by the askari, well-trained and exceedingly smart, we climbed the last switchback ridges guarding the Italian frontier. Jones wore a beatific smile. "Thank the Lord," he said, "I needn't see another egg for years!" There was a reflective air about him which I mistrusted.

"Don't begin to count them," I implored.

As soon as the roofs of Italian Addi Quala, thatch and tin, mud and plaster, came into view on the edge of the plateau—to which we had climbed from a dry river-bed full of wells—our one thought was the car.

"Supposing it hasn't arrived!" we said aghast—for we had discarded joyfully and very thoroughly at Mareb all that rocks and thorns had left us of camp outfit. There was a moment of anxiety. Then, beside a white Government building, we found a sturdy Fiat lorry. Into this we piled all our luggage, while Jones, who had a passion for counting—developed, I believe, by some mysterious necessity of his work—assured me that we had ridden four hundred and fifty-one hours since we left Dire Dawa. Discreetly, in the shelter of some pepper trees, I shed my tattered boots and breeches. As I emerged, skirted, wondering, for the first time, how many inches of my once-shingled hair were poking out under my hat-brim, the smiling Italian driver ran up to me. "Signora, a present is lucky at the end of a journey. See, a hen has laid an egg for you in the lorry!"

"I'm glad you didn't give it to the Signor," I returned. "It would have spoilt his calculations."

Our farewells were long and complicated by the local headman, who piled 'anjera'<sup>1</sup> and jars of 'talla'<sup>1</sup> at my feet in the middle of them; but at last we were off, a cloud of dust behind us and a road—a real road—in front of us. Jones took off his hat and bowed as we passed the caravan, which a monkey-like slave was driving to water.

"I hope I may never meet a mule again—at least, not intimately," he said.

"I shall miss that jelly-fish feeling in the morning," I reflected, "when one wonders if one can keep one's back upright through another day's jolting."

So, after a thousand and ninety miles, most of them on gradients only suited to a centipede, we departed from Abyssinia, the richer for our cases of exposed film and a host of memories grave and gay, the poorer for the little bit of oneself that one leaves on every journey.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *'International Garden-Party'*

IN ASMARA, capital of Italian Eritrea, I stormed the post office to ask for letters. It was months since I had had news from Arthur. Day in, day out on the long march from Addis Ababa, I had thought of the growing pile of letters which would be waiting for me at the end of the journey. I shall never forget my disappointment when the neat, coal-black clerk failed to produce any envelopes addressed in my husband's writing. Heart-sick I cabled. The reply came quickly, "Written every week." Back I went to the post office and insisted on emptying every pigeon-hole. In time, I discovered a goodly pile. The bewildered post-master insisted that by no stretch of the imagination could the name be read as 'McGrath'. But he let me take my mail. For the greater part of a day, I sat under a pepper-tree and read all that I wanted to hear. Arthur has a talent for letter-writing.

I remember nothing of the journey home except that my impatience made it very uncomfortable. When we reached Brindisi, our cases of film turned it into a nightmare. Jones would not be parted from them. Two or three times he dragged me out of my berth in the small hours to save them from curious officials. Fortunately, at some period we made friends with a girl who had two lion cubs in sweet-baskets, tied with pink satin ribbon. She could speak no foreign language. So in return for my services as interpreter, she loaned me the cubs. Customs officers became so excited over these that they forgot the film cases. Even Dover—august and impartial—was roused to frenzy by the growls of my 'red herrings'. I was fined for pretending the cubs were

<sup>1</sup> 'Anjera', native bread; 'talla', ale.

crystallized fruits, and among all this fuss, Jones got his precious cases unopened on to the train.

This time success was unpunctuated by disappointment. The *Daily Telegraph* and my unfailing friend, Sir Newman Flower of Cassell's, were pleased with my book. It was the gayest I had written. The film had a spectacular première at the Plaza. Jones and Arthur and I sat in a box with the Duke of Connaught and the enchanting Lady Hanbury, who always inspires me to adventure. H.R.H. boldly said it was the best travel film he had seen. Dodo Hanbury asked me if I would ever get off my little duckboard. This was a private joke which lasted for years. During a week devoted to dress shows in Paris, we had escaped to watch the ducks on a pond in the Bois de Boulogne. They stood upon small, floating boards and looked at the water, but were too lazy to get into it. "That is so like you," said my beloved and lovely Dodo. "You could swim as far as you like, you could plunge headlong into life, but you won't look under the surface. You stay on your little duckboard and watch what is happening all around, without sharing, without feeling. . . ."

My best friends have always regarded me as an onlooker—perhaps because two-thirds of my life were spent out of England. Nobody except Arthur knew exactly where I went or what I did. Legends grew. Some said I was 'in intelligence', others that I had a mysterious love affair. In actual fact, my life was prosaic. There were no lovers and no secret service work. I travelled. I learned languages. I wrote. In the summers, I entertained an extraordinary diversity of friends and interesting strangers in houses which grew bigger as we progressed into middle age.

Together, Arthur and I motored out of London every Friday and back to it early on Monday mornings. For fifteen years, it seems to me, we spent each week-end at a different country house.

Mrs. Wilfrid Ashley, afterwards Lady Mount-Temple, was a great friend of mine. She was a celebrated hostess, and I remember constant house-parties at Broadlands, which now belongs to her step-daughter Lady Louis Mountbatten. It is a big Adam house, white and classical. It might have been austere, but Molly Ashley had a genius for decoration. Her clothes, the arrangement of her flowers, her dinners and the just sufficiently adventurous colour-schemes in her bedrooms were all perfect. She danced like a leaf in a spring breeze. She was full of new ideas. It was always great fun staying with her. I remember one particular party for Goodwood. Two of the pretty Greek Princesses were there. Edwina Mountbatten and her red-haired sister Mary, who has the loveliest hands I know, Marjorie Brecknock, with her deliciously curly head, were also among the guests. Molly always collected good-looking women. She had no fear of rivalry. Her shape was beyond reproach and it was a delight to look at her head. We had a wild treasure hunt, all over Broadlands. Victory was divided

between Theodora of Greece and me. We had both kicked off our high-heeled shoes to run faster through the long corridors and across the big, square Georgian rooms, and at the end of the hunt we could not remember where we had left them. So there was another search. H.R.H.'s were found—thriftily out of reach upon a wardrobe. Mine lay where they had been carelessly abandoned—one under a console, the other mixed up with a curtain. I have never been able to look after my possessions—or my heart.

Often we stayed with General and Mrs. Wigan at Danbury Park in Essex. It had the loveliest spring garden, sloping in a rush of flowering shrubs to three lakes. I am godmother to Aline Wigan's son David and find it surprising to think of him now as a budding pilot in the R.A.F. Of course, I imagine all my friends are faultless, or only improved by original and engaging faults, so what is the use of describing them?

Dumbleton, where the Monsells have carpeted a valley between Gloucestershire hills with gardens as imaginative and expressive as a novel by Anatole France, is happily connected with Whitsuntides. We went there most years, when blossom was at full tide. There, I learned the difference between what a Frenchwoman expects from all men and what an Englishwoman may receive, if she is fortunate, from one. For Germaine Paget was at Dumbleton. She was always beautifully dressed and irresistible to Latin or Slav. Together we looked from a window at three tennis courts in actions. "*C'est curieux*," reflected the Parisian, "how much you English like balls, and *enfin*, how little your men like anything else, unless it is a horse or a fish."

Startled, I asked for more. "*Chez nous* in France, men are interested in woman. *La femme* is all powerful and her age does not matter. Here, a man may be interested in one woman or a succession of them—but that is all. How much you miss."

Below us, we could see a motor turning out of the park and across the terrace. "*Tiens*, here is somebody else arriving——" Neat, tweed shoulders came out of the car. "It is a man——" Germaine leaned over the sill, interested and expectant. The new arrival carefully produced a bag of golf-clubs from the back seat. "Oh, no!" concluded the Frenchwoman, disillusioned. "It is only another sportsman."

Bobbie Monsell at that time was Chief Whip. Later he became First Lord of the Admiralty, under Mr. Baldwin, and was among the first to see the dangers of Hitlerism. His naval parity treaty gave some encouragement to the socialists of the Weimar Republic. In and out of season Lord Monsell begged support for the democratic statesmen Bruning and Stresemann, so that the Nazis should have no chance to win an election on German discontent and disappointment.

At West Dean, where King Edward VII's bedroom was still a shrine decked with the muslins and pink ribbons of his period, we used to stay with Edward and Karen Sturdy, generally for some ball in the

neighbourhood. I remember one at Arundel for the present Duke's coming of age. At it Joyce Fitzalan Howard was a striking figure. She and I have evolved more or less together. She used to be shy as I was—and equally amazing in the matter of Ascot frocks. Press snapshots showed us—with the beautiful, enormous-eyed Margot Chesham—in the most uncomfortable combinations of unwieldy hats, hobble skirts and shoes impracticable as Cinderella's. The years have given Joyce assurance, knowledge and brilliance. If there are great hostesses after the war, she will surely be one of them—while I grow oranges forgotten and happy under an Eleutheran sun.

I remember that particular ball at Arundel, because most of the West Dean house-party got lost—in pairs—coming back across the Downs. Lady Broughton gave my husband a lift and they arrived—exhausted and amused—for a dawn breakfast, having driven half over the county. Andrew Vanneck and I were reduced to bitterness when for the second time we found ourselves at the gates of Goodwood House. Despairing, the chauffeur said, "I could've sworn this was West Dean."

"Well, it isn't," we said together and with fury.

"Don't you *know* the Richmonds?" demanded Andrew, thinking only of bed—any bed.

"No," I said, "I do not."

"Oh, well—we'll have to try again," he retorted, in the tones of a harassed tutor whose charge refuses to know the alphabet. We tried again and found ourselves in the middle of the largest empty space in that part of England. There was not even a tree. We went on trying. The next direction we took brought us to the outskirts of Chichester. By this time, I did not care what happened. "Have you any money?" I asked. "I must sleep somewhere—there must be a hotel."

Andrew was horrified. "Nonsense," he said. "We must get back somehow."

We did. It was very much 'somehow'. For we arrived at last at a gate I recognized. It led into the famous tree-garden of West Dean. Miles long, this stretches on and on into woods. Through these, I insisted on walking. "No, I won't risk losing even this gate," I repeated. "If we try any more for the front one we'll only find ourselves back at Goodwood."

"I can't think why you don't know the Richmonds——" began Andrew.

Mortified, I tramped through a great deal of mud. Mute and furious he followed. Fortunately, there were *pâté de foie gras* sandwiches—when we reached the house—and other strayed couples to make us laugh.

In so many places we stayed during those years of peace. Recurrent as the bright beads of a necklace, I remember La Mortola, the celebrated

garden of the Riviera. It belongs to the Hanburys, and before Fascists took it in the course of their rush into defeated France, it was a delight to us all. I have never seen such flowers. Legend has it that there were ninety gardeners. I do not know if this is true, but Kew and La Mortola used to exchange experts. What we called the 'mummy garden' was full of rare cactus. They sat up like stiff, strange animals, heavily furred and spiked. But elsewhere the terraces fell in glorious self-abandon, right over the hill, until among olives and irises, roses and lilies, they reached the sea.

Wells put the garden into a novel. The Italian Princesses stayed there on their sad ways. One led to a Bulgarian throne which, popular as it is among its own people, is jeopardized by the side on which, reluctantly, it fights to-day. King Boris used to say, "My wife of course is pro-Italian, my people are pro-Russian, my Ministers are pro-German. I alone am neutral, and that is always the weakest position." The Crown Princess who was Marie José of Belgium used to come to La Mortola. She had inherited King Albert's brains and determination, so she contrived with tact and sense to evade becoming a Fascist. Since the death, in Kenya, of the Duke of Aosta, adored in Italy, she is by far the most popular member of the royal family. The King has a limited following, the Prince of Piedmont none. So the hopes of patriotic Italians, devoted in theory to the House of Savoy, are centred on the Crown Princess and her son.

At La Mortola I remember the people I like best in holiday mood and few clothes. We bathed all day in the sun and occasionally in the sea. We could have bathed in the flowers. There were such masses of them. I remember figs. We all ate too many. One day the fatherly, the conspiratorial, the archiepiscopal butler, who owned La Mortola and us, removed the bowl full of luscious black and green from Lady Hanbury's side. "No, Signora, *bastante adesso!* You have eaten enough. You will be sick——"

It was all very feudal. When a village girl was well into her 'teens, her mother came to see Dodo. "Signora," she said, "my daughter is now of an age for service. In what capacity would you like to employ her?" So the whole *paese* found work. Grandfathers dug in the garden. Grand-nieces scoured the kitchen. Great-grandchildren hunted for lost tennis balls or captured metallic turquoise-blue frogs with which we wanted to brighten English pools.

Dodo was never perturbed by the number of her responsibilities. She took charge of her friends, loved them and looked after them. She was golden of hair and skin—a tall, splendid woman whom the years could not touch. She belonged to the sun and it made her beautiful. One morning, she said to me, "Good heavens, Sita! I've just remembered I was forty the day before yesterday. I must telegraph to Cecil"—her M.P. husband—"and ask if he minds."

"Do you?" I questioned.

"Oh, no, I think it's rather a relief. Have you ever realized that our generation is going to be old inside long before it looks old?"

While I considered the matter, she continued, "We do too much. We wear out our emotions. But we do a lot to our faces too; they haven't a chance to grow middle-aged comfortably—with our hearts."

Among the many delightful people who used to stay at Mortola was Adèle Crofton. I think she was the best of our generation. She had the slim, sunburned body of a scarce-grown girl, the spirit of a saint and the heart of a confident child. But her understanding was full-grown and her kindness without measure. We used to walk high up the hills above La Mortola and talk about ourselves and life. Adèle, the delicate, exquisite creature who never had an enemy, treated life as if it were a reasonable grown-up. She asked from it with courtesy and gaiety what she felt she ought to have—and no more. How we all miss her! Her husband, Sir Morgan Crofton, a Household Cavalry Colonel in the last war, is now commanding the Home Guards in a coastal district. "If anyone had told me twenty years ago that I'd be hanging head downwards in a hedge wearing bumpy boots and uniform that feels like a flannel dressing-gown, shouting orders to major-generals turned into privates—well I'd have thought they were mad." So wrote Morgan a few months ago. He is undefeated and equally effective as friend, enemy, host or raconteur.

Dodo Hanbury was the most mobile of my friends. She was always audacious. One year Arthur and I drove a new 40 h.p. car into a tree on our way across France. It was mid-summer, hot and slumbrous. We were travelling at sixty miles an hour along one of those endless, straight, white, empty roads, bordered with poplars. Arthur drowsed for a second. The huge Packard chose its tree and made for it. The crash was terrific.

From afar off, I heard a French voice saying, "No! No! I will not look. Me, I do not like corpses!"

Indignantly I struggled forth. "We are not corpses," I said. My knees had come up hard against the dashboard. Most of the clock was in one, the speedometer in the other. Arthur was in worse shape. For days afterwards, we weeded glass out of his forehead. His shirt was covered with blood. Only one spike of the driving-wheel remained. I thought it had gone into his chest. So I was naturally furious with the young French girl who insisted on tearing off my stockings and—after one glance at the knees underneath—collapsed. It ended in my having to revive her—with brandy and slaps—before her husband or father would drive us on to the nearest town.

It was Châtillon-sur-Seine. There, the hotel staff argued furiously over our capacity to pay, pushing us first in the direction of a small room, then—when they heard we had '*une très belle et grande voiture*'—into a larger one. French thrift came out on top. While there was any idea of our demise, we were asked to pay in advance. Fortun-

ately the ominous colour of Arthur's shirt was due to his head, not to half the steering-wheel being embodied in his chest—as I had feared. He was propped on a bed. I lay upon another and a doctor swabbed iodine and oxygenated water into my split knees. While I bit my lips to avoid yelling at the pain he needlessly inflicted, the Mayor pushed his way into the room. Arthur was then head of an M.I. Section at the War Office and he had some official *laissez-passers*. These had been picked out of the remains of the car and taken to the local authorities.

Unblushing, the Mayor regarded my contortions under fragmentary pink chiffon. "Madame," he addressed me, "I have looked at your husband. It sees itself that he cannot recover. But I assure you, Madame, that he shall have obsequies of the most remarkable."

Appalled, I scurried off the bed and into Arthur's room. He seemed to be all right, except for the windscreen oozing out of his forehead. "Oh, darling," he said ruefully, "our lovely holiday."

I cannot remember why we telegraphed to Dodo Hanbury in England. Perhaps we were going to meet in some far corner of Europe, for she was foot-loose as Khadija, daughter of the elusive Abdullah Fahmi. Her reply was typical—and laconic. "Arriving at once." She came—the darling—with books and bandages and authority. She dealt with bills on which chickens had bred without reason and 'extras' repeated the miracle of the loaves and fishes. We were packed into Switzerland, the Packard mopped up and returned to a startled Insurance Company. When they looked at the sunset effect inside, they were so relieved we were not dead that they built us another without protest.

In Switzerland we stayed with Lady Russell, a curious combination of romantic and cynic. She wrote *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, and was the mother by her first marriage of a Prussian General, Von Arnim. All day, she played chess with Lord Askwith. All day I limped beside the striding figure of a dark, god-like youth to whom mountains were irresistible. All day, the sun shone. Gradually my knees mended—but the darns still show and Arthur's head is elegantly ridged.

I think that was the year we first stayed with Violet Trefusis in her legendary Tower of the Sainted Wolf, about forty miles from Paris. There the garden had the faint melancholy inseparable from French manorial life. It was surrounded by rough grey stone walls. The woods were delicate and sorrowful.

Violet, accustomed to coverts as the natural complement of game, had invited the British Ambassador to shoot. Not till he accepted did she realize there was nothing for him to kill. Out of this dilemma she contrived a delicious tale which she tells—in French—with the pleasure of a chef creating a soufflé surprise.

Consulting her maid, who was *débrouillarde*, she learned that



poulterers in Paris generally kept two or three live birds to advertise their wares. In her long, swift car which was not accustomed to back streets, she went from shop to shop collecting pheasants. She insists that she took them home in hat-boxes, turned them loose in her bathroom and forgot about them after a late party. Next morning, her chiropodist flung open the door and was greeted by what—for one fearful moment—he supposed was the result of too much indulgence at his daughter's wedding the previous day. A feather coverlet—*un plumeau*—went mad and descended on his head!

Undaunted, Violet re-packed the birds and motored them out to her 'tower of the holy wolf'. The hat-boxes were carried up to the roof and the pheasants let loose. "I thought they would be delighted," said Violet impressively. "The woods were all there—below—for them to look at! They could choose where they wanted to settle—but, figure to yourself, would those birds fly? Not at all. There was no enterprise, no spirit among them. We had to push them off the roof." A pause before the sad *dénouement*. Leaning forward, intent and effective, as serious as the young man married to the chiropodist's daughter, Violet gave no hint of what was to come. It had full shock value. "My dear—their wings had all been clipped. They could not fly. They fell—they fell flat." Mournfully she added, "We ate pheasant for every meal—for days. It was too much. I went back to Paris."

From her mother, Mrs. George Keppel, Violet inherited the art of speech and the qualities which made her a superlative hostess. She could weld the most dissident elements into a successful party. Under her roof, I saw a good deal of France, for I met politicians, editors and landowners—all expressive and ineffective. The majority were inspired by admiration for their hostess to flights of intelligence which made me feel a bumble-bee among eagles. They were convinced of their own value. They took for granted that French culture was the supreme achievement of civilization. It was difficult for them to understand races less consciously sophisticated. The 'stupidity' of England was a nightmare to them, yet oddly enough, while they saw the holes and worn places in their own national structure, they made no practical attempt to mend them. Conversation at the Tour du Saint Loup was as good as the cooking and the wine, but with complete mastery of words, *députés* and writers and actors, royalists, republicans and on occasion a cherished communist lost sight of the need for action. All this was interesting, alarming—and prophetic.

During the first seven years of our married life Arthur and I must have stayed in country-houses from one end of Europe to another. I remember a chill visit to Norway when the snows were melting. The Anglo-Norwegian Society had invited me to speak at Bergen and at Oslo. I remember the crisp frozen stillness of the North and the iron dark limbs of mountains thrusting out of the mists as we travelled

south. The capital seemed to me clean, fresh and well-arranged, with plenty of emptiness lying about between the prosperous, neat business districts. I cannot explain that impression of free quiet space which comes into my mind when I think of Norway. The people are not emphatic. They are strictly reasonable, serious and well-informed. For a thousand years they have gone their own way—even under the rule of a neighbour—and they found their way good. They are hard to influence and do not readily give up a simplicity bordering on austerity which is natural to the extreme North.

Oslo has lost the reflection of the midnight sun, but it is essentially the creation of burghers and seamen. It has no traditional aristocracy and the palace looks forlorn—set in the middle of shops and merchants' houses. There King Haakon and Queen Maud welcomed us and talked enthusiastically about their multiple activities. I imagine they were lonely, in spite of their deep interest in the young country they ruled. It was an exceedingly democratic rule, and court life was the least ceremonial I have known. The King used to take his guests to the furthest doors and the Queen always disconcerted me by standing aside for me to pass into a room in front of her. As she was always talking with vivid gaiety so that one wanted to listen rather than to think, it was difficult to remember not to do so. She was an amazingly active woman and must have been very strong. Her days were unending. She was quite capable of ski-ing all morning, walking or skating throughout the afternoon and dancing most of the night, with hours of work tucked in between. King Haakon told us, "She wears out all her ladies-in-waiting. We have to get them younger and younger every year." I remember Queen Maud's sitting-room, with battalions of photographs on every table, dogs asleep in the armchairs, journals, books and newspapers stacked on every flat surface. It was exactly like the rooms of other Queens in similar palaces all over Europe. I wondered if royalty must, of pitiful necessity, barricade itself against an intimate, personal loneliness with such a mass of photographs and souvenirs and collections of *objets d'art*. These perhaps are the walls with which sovereigns emphasize and at the same time protect the consciousness of being different. Of this they must be convinced. How otherwise could they exist?

Later that year, we went to Holland. Instead of grim metal ranges and the startling peace of snows, there were windmills and spotted cows, tulips, blue and white china, castles set foursquare in the middle of moats, and pictures—such pictures!

I fell in love with The Hague—Villon's '*plus beau village du monde*'. The Dutch are a serious race—and to them in Amsterdam as well as in the capital. I spoke seriously about the Arabs whose civilization touched their own as far east as the Indies. Countess Limburg Stirum looked after us in The Hague. With her, I remember playing bridge, eating a great deal, standing—drunk with beauty—

before one great painting after another, and motoring through splendidly empty beechwoods, with no undergrowth to complicate the august simplicity of design. I like shape without bulk, bare branches with no smothering upholstery of leaves. So I shall always remember the distinction of Holland's beeches and the flat, quiet country, so like the fens where for centuries my people lived.

We motored to Leyden to visit Dr. Snouck Hougronje, who had lived in Mecca. It was enthralling to meet him. He was dry, and lean, and vital as a grasshopper. His conversation was grave and thoughtful. It seems that many of his Moslem friends knew he was an 'infidel', but they enjoyed his brain so much that they kept his secret.

In one of the lovely moated country houses, we stayed with the Van Haekeren Van Kells. The young and pretty daughter had just become a maid-of-honour to Queen Wilhelmina. In a garden where still sheets of water took the place of flowers, we heard much about the stalwart, laborious and determined Dutch Queen, who knew her own mind thoroughly and made up the minds of others. There was already an active communist element in Holland, but it had little chance of success. One of the Ministers said to us, "Can you imagine communism in a country where anyone can walk down the high street and look in through the palace windows to see the Queen sewing?" Solidity of family life was impressive in Holland. The unimportance of the army was dismaying. Arthur and I were amazed by the low pay of the officers and their entire lack of assurance. Staying in delightful country houses, we never met any soldiers. The sons of Dutch gentry did not consider the army a possible career. It was reserved for the lower middle class. Given the greatness of Holland in earlier ages, this surprised us, but I suppose the Dutch are primarily seamen.

So far as we were concerned, the international garden-party continued. On the Wannsee near Berlin, we stayed one year with General Wauchope, in charge of the Commission of Control, and later with many German friends. These visits always had an undercurrent of distress. For we watched a nation pass from despair to grinding bitterness, and so to a need of revenge powerful as any other religion. When we first travelled in Germany we saw people diseased from hunger and privation, tubercular children brittle as matches, girls hopeless of marriage because there was no employment for the young men who would normally have supported them. We saw family life at an end for lack of the simplest necessities, while civic and financial control was manipulated by a few Jews whose whole race has suffered in consequence. We saw a nation in a state of spiritual defeat, disillusioned and hopeless. At that time there was no rancour against England. The French had behaved so badly in the Rhineland that our people—just to the ultimate fraction—were liked and approved. But it was

terrible to see a self-respecting, hard-working race conscious only of defeat. Whatever we asked in the Germany of 1920-28, the answer was likely to be, "We haven't got any. How could we have, we lost the war."

I was glad to leave—generally for Poland, so delighted with its independence that it did not take enough thought for the morrow. In Warsaw, we stayed with the Raczyńskis in their historical palace which Joyce, the young English wife, was restoring to beauty. Poland I love. The country is so steeped in blood and courage that it is in itself a battle-flag. The Poles have made love, passion and adventure out of war. Always they have defended, not only their own country against overwhelming force, but a spiritual integrity which they have never lost. Finns, Poles, Magyars and Serbs seem to me in all the world most worthy of independence. For none of them have compromised with necessity. All have been willing to sacrifice on a Biblical scale. Yet Poland was as short-sighted with regard to her minorities as the other victorious states after the last war. She had suffered so much as a separate entity under the Czarist rule that she could not tolerate racial autonomies within her newly extended borders. It is undoubted that the German miners in Pless, the German villages in Silesia had a bad time—especially as the weakness of the League of Nations became apparent. Poland—and Hungary—remained with monarchical Spain the last feudal countries in Europe. On this account they were doomed. We loved the great estates of Poland, where there might be a hundred horses in the stables, where Potockis, Radzivils and Sapichas entertained us as if life had stood still since the prodigal days of our Edward VII. At the Potocki palace, a coach and four could be driven straight into the hall, to the foot of the grand staircase, and however many the guests, a footman in white gloves stood behind each chair. The son of one great house, who thought himself a modern, argued with his father that forty hacks were sufficient to mount the family and their friends. "Nonsense," said the old man, "I like plenty of choice." There was too much difference in Poland between the feudal estates stretching for miles and the squalid cramped quarters where the Jews lived in Warsaw, or the hovels of the peasants.

In Hungary, fundamentally it was much the same thing, but the distinction was not so marked. For on the great plains where the shepherds are nomad, landowners and peasants had long established a comfortable relationship.

The feudal system is well enough in a country of landlords farming their own estates. It was only in Budapest that I saw the first struggles of young intellectuals, not only for self-expression, but in the name of socialism, for the establishment of what amounted to a middle class. In Hungary, we stayed with Rubido Zichy, who represented his country in London. It was exactly as if we had been in an old-fashioned, rather formal Lincolnshire manor, except that there

was no talk of gardening. All over England, whether it be with the Gloucesters at Barnwell Manor, which used to belong to my sister-in-law, Joy McGrath, or with the Puritan banking Smiths in some square grey house redolent of lavender and thyme, it is impossible to avoid going out to pick one more delphinium for a particular bowl, or to see what the rain has done to a herbaceous border.

Two episodes in Hungary I remember, for I was shocked by both. It happened that Baron Zichy, driving fast along a dust-quilted road, knocked over a peasant. If it was anybody's fault, it was ours, but the man, emerging unhurt from the wheels, apologized again and again for being in the way of the noble gentleman. Of course, he was given money. The Hungarians are fantastically generous. They say in Budapest—lovely as the best dreams—that every *pengő* changes pockets two or three times each night. No doubt the villager made a month's wages out of the tumble and thought it a miracle of fortune, but I hated his humble repetition of excuses.

The other incident was funny. A Magyar baron invited us to dine in Budapest. It was a large party. Princes and diplomatists were present, also Lili Hadvany, a beautiful and brilliant Jewish baroness, who was an accomplished musician and a playwright. All night we went—as is the habit of Budapest—from one gay place to another. We danced. We listened to gypsy music which tears out one's heart and leaves tears in the void. We ate goose liver and drank golden, sweet Tokay.

Next day, driving into the country to stay with his young wife, the Magyar landowner said to me, "Please don't tell Elizabeth about the party last night." "Why not?" I asked, startled. Our host looked uncomfortable. "I shouldn't have invited a Jewess," he said. "But Lili is so clever and she writes. I thought you would like to meet her." "I DID," I said furiously and in capital letters.

So much English blood flows through that international country life which before the war spread from the Balkans to the Baltic. My greatest friends were the two O'Connor girls, daughters of a British Ambassador to Czarist Russia. One of them married a Lincolnshire squire, the other a Roumanian prince. Often we used to stay at Kilkenny—one of the oldest inhabited castles in Ireland, far too vast for comfort, or even for hot food—with George and Sybil Ossory, now Lord and Lady Ormonde. The latter's sister was married to a Swede who was a very fine musician. The Italian Princess Doria, who taught me to know Rome, was English born. My favourite German friend, Rilü zu Döhma, married an Englishman, and her brother a delightful Dutch girl. With 'Sheila' Westminster, enormous-eyed, perennially vital, infinitely sure of herself, convinced of unchanging excellence in her own brilliant pattern of life—in petit point—we constantly stayed, in a hollow of the New Forest or beside a Scottish river. Her sister is married to a German and her cousin to a Czech. So there were no

frontiers to the Europe we knew best. It spread over plains across which we rode careless of language, over hills whereon we hunted and woods where we shot—from Greece to Scandinavia. Our Europe was shabby and impoverished. It had splendid jewels, vast acres and a multiplicity of castles. It was inspired by a strong sense of duty national and local, but it had little interest in politics. There were invariably holes in the carpets and curtains. Clothes were often shabby, but worn with an air which made them fashionable. The food was bad and the wine good. On the whole there was a sense of international kinship which should have made for understanding. But the power of the land-owners had gone, except in Hungary and Poland. Even Roumania had expropriated the big estates.

We knew the elegant Europe which was at its last gasp, and from it escaped to the Europe of soldiers, writers and business men. Awkward, vindictive, vigorous, uncertain of themselves, sure of persecution, turbulently creative and discontented, they were struggling into power. All this was very interesting. It was also perturbing.

In Belgium one year, I represented England at the centenary of the Royal Antwerp Geographical Society. General Gouraud did the same for France. An Archbishop with a beard to his waist, wearing flowing white woollen robes, came from the Belgian Congo and spoke for an hour instead of the expected ten minutes. The eminent French General, talking of his country's imperial achievements from Cochin China to Morocco, was equally eloquent—and loquacious. In colour and shape like a red pencil, I stood upon the platform banked with flowers, and felt more ignorant than usual. But I was applauded by an audience longing for the relief of coffee—because I only spoke for ten minutes and I presented the learned and the soporific with opportunities for laughter. How they had all longed—during four solid hours—to laugh!

The Crown Prince had just been married to Princess Astrid of Sweden. The ceremonies were divided between Stockholm and Belgium. I came in for the second half—with the General and the Archbishop. King Albert, I thought, was the best statesman in Europe. His son I found very definite and decided in his ideas, with plenty of self-confidence. He said to me, "If I hadn't got to be a king, I'd like to be Captain and Master of my own tramp-steamer. I'd have a grand time going all over the world." I replied that I would prefer a full-rigged sailing ship. It would be more romantic. "I'd be too impatient," said the prince, "I like getting to places." His eyes wandered in search of Princess Astrid. When they found her they smiled. I do not think I have ever seen anyone happier. It was then I realized the young man's good looks. They were founded on a clear, keen, physical fitness. For the Crown Prince took games, riding and shooting, languages and golf as seriously as friends, the language and self-consciousness of his Walloon subjects, political economy and peace.

He had been a soldier—in the trenches—in the middle of being a schoolboy at Eton. As a result he was the most ardent and whole-hearted worshipper of peace.

Princess Astrid was different. It is usual to exaggerate the qualities of royalty. Queens are always supposed to be beautiful, and indeed the Greek princesses have brought beauty to several courts.

But the Crown Princess of Belgium was the more arresting figure. Whenever that exquisite—and happy—woman talked to me, she made me feel assured, approved and interesting. Her husband once said to me, "But she does like people enormously. That is her own particular secret. She likes people so much and is so pleased to see them that she takes it for granted they are glad to see her too." No wonder the Belgians loved her as Queen. No wonder they are glad no one will take her place.

A few months ago, in Western England, I lunched in a Belgian mess. The Colonel said, "We are pleased that the King has married again. In the charming and very simple girl of his choice, he has found a wife who will also be a good companion. It is in keeping with popular feeling these days. But he has not given Belgium another Queen. So he has satisfied us all—and his own enduring love for Astrid."

## CHAPTER XVII

1928

### *With the Foreign Legion*

SO MANY TRAVELS, so many friendships outside the tight little parcel of Britain, gave both Arthur and me an international point of view. It became difficult for us to consider England alone, without the European pattern in which—humanly speaking—she must always be an important thread. It was impossible to go on labelling countries as 'enemy' or 'ally' and pushing them into convenient mental pigeon-holes. We were forced to distinguish between peoples and their governments—between spiritual or material necessities and politics. All this makes for wisdom, if not for practical efficiency. Perhaps only fanatics can achieve complete success. If you are familiar with all sides of a question, it is difficult to force an issue on one facet alone. Probably I have seen too much of the world and known too many individuals of all kinds. So I cannot think of Europe as a map to be re-drawn, or as material to be tailored into convenient political shape. Countries, for me, are a patchwork of the farmers and shepherds I watched, the writers and workers with whom I argued and drank beer, the merchants with their narrow vision of prosperity, the growing

lads and girls who blazed into enthusiasm over diverse ideals, the patriots and the rebels making wholehearted sacrifice on altars sometimes very strange indeed. Countries achieve reality by their aspirations. These are always partly justified. For all peoples struggle above everything else for different kinds of safety. Such security—of land and food, shelter and work, of thought and family life—is synonymous with peace. This was the need of Europe. Even the ordinary people of Germany wanted peace, but Hitler thought it could only be established by force of arms. So 'Insanity Fair' was the best name for the Europe I saw, year after year, from 1921 to 1939.

It was a relief to return to Africa. In February, 1938, Arthur and I travelled together among the French military posts in Morocco and south of the Atlas where the Foreign Legion watched a fluid frontier along the red deserts of Mauretania. It was a particularly interesting journey, during which we saw French colonization at its best, and I could appreciate the progress made in the last eight or nine years. There were no more corpses of soldiers *éventrés* and stuffed with straw. The big Kaids supported the French. New roads had opened the land for agriculture. There were clocks in the villages. Life took account of time. Incidentally, it was Haroun er Raschid, the great Arab ruler, who gave the first known watch to King Charlemagne. Marshal Lyautey returned the gift to Morocco.

When we reached Marakesh, spring had carpeted the plains with flowers. Among them, camels stood knee-deep looking like tortoises on stilts. The first foals were awkward as toys coming to life in a ballet. The great red walls of Marakesh sprawl towards the hills like a wounded leviathan. To me, they are the epitome of adventure. I do not know why. Except for the murder of a dancer by her Nubian lover in a house of ill fame to which we were mistakenly invited by a party of American tourists—nothing exciting ever happened to me under the red lily tower. Yet Marakesh is passionate and beautiful—like the lone, mud houses of Figuig, brushed by almond blossom on the edge of the Sahara, or like flying over Brazilian forest with scarlet ibis spattered as drops of red ink on the tree-tops. Adventure is of the spirit, not the body. It is in the eyes and the heart, not the senses.

In spite of all advice—military and civil—Arthur and I tried to take a short cut over the Atlas, by Midelt, a small French outpost snow-bound in winter. There were supposed to be 'dissidents' living in caves among the shaggy forests. We were warned not to provide them with a target. I remembered this when we stuck in our first drift and laboriously dug ourselves out with the aid of stray tribesmen. Arthur was imperturbable as usual. I believe he has no sense of physical danger. On we went for a few miles. The 'military road' disappeared altogether. There was no possibility of finding it under the snow. We tried walking ahead of the car, probing with long sticks, but we sank into deeper drifts and stuck there. This time only a herd



of wild boars came to stare at us. One very fine tusker looked as if he meditated a charge.

We had to go back again and right round through the half-desert east of the Atlas. It was several hundred miles. We engaged a battered car, driven by an Arab who started the journey clean-shaven and ended it with a fine beard. One night we spent in a mining camp on the edge of the mountains. It was the most dramatic place. The rocks were blackened with manganese. The camels and donkeys which carried the ore were equally dark. The air was full of grit and the miners—most of them outlaws or fugitives from justice—as stained and scarred as the hillside. That night we ate in a whitewashed café, with a naphtha lamp swinging from the ceiling. It threw distorted shadows over men who looked as if grime had eaten into their skins. Near the bar a child was propped in a high chair. His face was white and smooth, his hair like lint. He never smiled, but out of his expressionless black eyes he watched the miners drinking.

"You must make acquaintance with my Raoul," said the large-bosomed *patronne*. "He is villainous, that little one, but what an intelligence he has! Nothing disturbs him—not even a murder, and he has seen several." Candles were lit and stuck flickering on the window-sills. The lamp was extinguished. Then the miners put lumps of sugar into their raw alcohol and set it alight. Every face was thrown into sharp relief by a blue-green flame. The room disappeared. There was only the child's paper-white face, with eyes like holes in a bag and its hand holding a long, lean knife, the coarse, misshapen features of the men and the vast, crouching mimicry of shadow splayed behind them. I always remember that night, though nothing happened. I wonder how that child grew up. It was doomed to Devil's Island.

We could not sleep on the hard planks which were supposed to be beds, so we started early and drove the whole day south. Sirocco was whispering over the desert. So long as it lasted everybody would be 'a little mad'.

When we reached the Hamada, a reddish desert tufted with fungus which the Arabs call 'cauliflowers of Bou Anane', the dry, hot wind was playing with the sand. Date-palms looked like agitated shaving-brushes with their stems tucked into pink cotton-wool. Along the wadi, blossom broke in foam over tall sun-baked towers. The gherds<sup>1</sup> on the other side were shaped into temples, tombs and battlements. The winds of centuries had given them these forms.

A post of the Legion stood above the wadi, where the curious dunes gave way to the desert. There we were entertained by a young, square-cut, sunburned officer with a spotted face and much character. "What a day you have chosen!" he said, and led us across a square intersected by rows of earthen huts. Groups of men lounged in those doorways which opened away from the wind. They were lean, lined, hard,

<sup>1</sup> Hard dunes.

indifferent and shabby. They wore faded khaki or dingy blue slops. Most of them had dogs. "That is the family of the Legionary," explained the little captain, who was enormously proud of his squadron. "We have fifty-two dogs here. I encourage them. These men have neither family nor hearth, but their dogs sleep beside them and that reminds them a little of home."

In an embrasure of the outer wall, the captain had arranged his quarters to look like a tent. Moroccan carpets covered the walls and ceiling. Others served as curtains and covered the hard bed. "It is comfortable, *hein?*" he said. "So I make myself a small interior wherever I go." Then he talked about his men. "It goes well with them so long as they do not think. I have rabbits here, pigs, chickens and sheep, so that when there is no fighting or road-building, there is some work for everybody. One must occupy the men, for if they stay in one place more than a few months they get the *cafard*, and then God knows what it comes into their heads to do!"

A Norwegian trooper brought tea in glasses. It was very sweet and flavoured with mint.

"Have you any English here?" asked Arthur.

"Ah, *mon Colonel*, your countrymen are too well established at home. They do not seek escape from themselves out here. *Néanmoins*, I have one *brigadier* who is English. He is not of a type to speak of his affairs. I know nothing about him. The others, they come at night and over a mouthful of anisette they tell me their stories."

I could imagine the intimate, stuffy atmosphere in the room. The wide empty desert would be shut away behind drawn curtains, the lamp, shaded by a gay native scarf, would light up the captain's companionable red face and his good-natured very blue eyes. His collar would be undone, but his boots—from London—would be shining with polish. "There is one here, a German who cut his wife into three pieces, but all the same he is a good fellow. A brain-storm, you understand." Arthur flicked me an amused glance. "I am not sure that I do," I remarked, wondering what had happened to the pieces.

"In this country," continued the captain, "one must understand everything. See you, I have here a colonel of the Russian Imperial Guard, and a Serbian equerry decorated by King Peter, and a banker who ran away with the *Caisse*. That one wants to re-establish himself at home. I made enquiries for him, but in France there is no amnesty for crime with violence. He would go to Devil's Island if he left the *Légion*. Here, naturally one asks no questions. That is understood. Madame, you will take a little glass?"

"No thank you," I said, and thought—it is not what the men find here that makes life unbearable. It is the memory of what they have left at home.

"We had one here whom nobody could explain," said our host, beaming over the anisette. "Finally, I could no longer restrain my

curiosity. I said to him, '*Enfin, mon brave*, what were you in the world?' He replied to me smiling, 'My captain, I was a priest.' Me, I was astonished, although I had noticed he was familiar with the Mass. I pushed my indiscretion so far as to ask why he had left his parish. *Purbleu*, he had humour, that one, for he answered, 'My captain, without a woman, which one of us would have lost paradise?'

It was sunset when we left the fort. A bugle rang out. The tri-colour was struck. We looked back—through the whirling sand—and saw men standing at attention, dust-coloured against the leaden desert. I wondered what they felt. Had it become a mechanical action or—standing there on the edge of the world, exiles every one of them and nameless—did they think of their own countries as they saluted a foreign flag?

Arthur and I went on to Bou Denib, the administrative centre of the vague protectorate where the shadow of civilization ended. The Atlas was a barrier to the North. I remember troopers of the *Légion* silhouetted against the skyline. They kept watch for raiders coming out of the great desert where the cracked wadis and the dunes gave cover.

At Bou Denib, we stayed with the Commanding Officer. In the market square we saw Jews, who had changed neither habits nor costume since their escape from the Spanish Inquisition. In heavy, embroidered velvets, like poppies or chrysanthemums, the women with enormous wired headdresses, they blazed against the desert—as out of place as a brilliantly illumined mediaeval missal in the midst of office files.

With the French colonel we rode along the wadi, full of palms and blossom, to visit the village sheikh. He entertained us with sweet tea and sweeter cakes in an upper room. We sat on the floor. The carpets were excellent and hand-woven. The brass trays came—machine-made—from Birmingham. The headman was far prouder of these. He asked if the engraving on the back was a proverb or a good wish—such as decorates the finely-wrought Damascan blades. We did not like to tell him it read 'For export only'.

Frenchmen and the settled Arabs of the villages were on the best of terms. They made common cause against the nomads who in those days held the Naboth's vineyard of Tafielt, a hot-bed of local wars, coveted by France. The sheikh we visited had talked with many Moslem travellers who had crossed the Sahara from all directions. He said, "The English rule as elder brothers, intolerant of the youngers' claim to growing up. The French are twin-brothers, sharing our habits and thoughts but not always our respect. The Italians are step-brothers. We have no bond with them." This was before the days of Fascist colonization and Air Marshal Balbo's spectacular successes in Tripolitania, where the high wages paid and the constant employment assured made the Italians popular.

On our way east again we stopped at the same outpost of the

Légion. The captain hurried to meet us with, "*Mon Colonel*, there is bad news."

Immediately, I visualized 'dissidents' mustering in the mountains. The previous day, a camp commandant had apologized for offering us no meat. "Our butcher was murdered last night," he said. "He may have had two or three small coins in his pocket."

But this time it was no raider intent on a meal or a kill. The little spotted captain could hardly get out the story. "It is a question of the English *brigadier*. He was ill. One saw that he suffered from his nerves. Ah, what pity that he did not come to me!"

Arthur interrupted with, "But what has happened?"

The Captain of Spahis made the most of his tale. In the middle of the night, he said, the *brigadier* had taken his rifle and gone out into the yard. With "an exactitude of the most surprising" he had driven the butt into a heap of stones. He had then retreated—as his footsteps showed—till he felt the wall behind him. Opening his tunic, he had run forward—laughing—and thrown himself straight on to his own bayonet. The bugler who sounded reveille found him spitted like a capon. The laugh with which he had welcomed death was distorted into a grimace.

For fully thirty seconds the boy stood still and stared. Then, dropping his instrument, for he was a lad fresh-joined after 'some small, insignificant difficulty' and 'with his past in front of him', he rushed to the nearest hut, shouting his tale to half-dressed men who were wondering if they should wash.

"*Mon Colonel*," concluded the little captain. "You must not blame the Légion. It is a good life for those who have nothing to regret. The loneliness of which the men speak is not what they find in Africa where there are good comrades and good fights—*enfin* plenty of movement—but what they bring with them from the countries they have forfeited. Here there is a chance of a career to take the place of family and home. Half my non-commissioned officers are foreigners, and any trooper can command a company." He turned to me. "In the Légion, Madame, one must be simple. One cannot live in two worlds at once."

How I agreed with him! It is always an error to live in more than one world. You see, understand and suffer too much. There is no limit to your hopeful and helpless mistakes. For out of one world, you are always addressing the other—then changing places, to make certain of failure. Thus is the way to purgatory paved with good intentions. It is best to limit your own and evade those of other people. A Rajput philosopher once suggested to me that you are allowed reincarnation, in order to narrow your experience within comforting bounds. "Infallibility," he said, "is the most agreeable fruit of ignorance."

*A London House and Fascist Italy in the Making*

IT IS STRANGE how chance encounters alter your whole life. One night in London, I sat next to young Robert Lutyens at a dinner given by Mary Borden the novelist. The son of the great architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens, talked to me about the co-ordination of shape and colour in decoration. It sounds a harmless—and a solemn—subject. In effect it twisted half my life into a new shape. For it led to our buying a big house and—as is always the way with possessions—belonging to it for six months of each year.

A day or two after that party in Mary's 'under the sea' dining-room, with sea-horses gambolling among crystal and wave-green, Robert took me to see a Chinese interior he had evolved for Lady Ravensdale. It was fascinating. Far more than that, it stirred my imagination and roused in me an ambition of which I had not previously been conscious. I wanted to possess beauty, instead of being content to see it—in bare trees and hills, flung in lilac shadow across a plain, in the colours of fruit heaped in a market-place, in blinding blue-white glaciers high above a metal desert. I forgot the Arab saying, "Possessions are jailers, habits are prison walls."

Arthur good-naturedly agreed to buy a house much too large for us. It was in the crescent of Great Cumberland Place, near Marble Arch. This is the neighbourhood of Tyburn and the historical gallows. Lord Tredegar, who is informed on many subjects, suggested that Catholic priests, hanged or beheaded by order of Protestant Courts, were given the last mass on the site where my Lords Cavan, Oranmore and Airlie lived in a row, with the Arthur McGraths and a charming old man called Sir James Leigh Wood tucked in between. I do not know if all the houses were haunted, but ours certainly had 'an atmosphere'. It was old and shaped like a fan, so that from a narrow Georgian front with a lovely arched doorway, it widened as it went further back. Footmen were always seeing cowed monks on the great stone staircase which circled round and round under a glass dome. Generally what they thought was a ghost in the dim light coming from wrought iron lanterns, was the Hoover. Its bag, standing upright, looked like a friar's hood. But Adèle Crofton once came to stay with us for three weeks and left after forty-eight hours. A number of these she spent on a sofa in the drawing-room, unable to bear what she also called 'the atmosphere'. Apparently it was stronger in the pale green guest-room with strange birds sprawling over the chintz. "If I'd stayed there

another moment, I would have suffocated," said Adèle. She was far too kind to criticize a mouse unless it had behaved with outrageous unexpectedness. But when I slept in each bedroom in turn, I felt nothing at all—except appreciation of our carefully cultivated colour-schemes.

Robert Lutyens and I enjoyed ourselves enormously over this house. We were preposterously extravagant. We pulled down walls and built lovely flights of arches. We planted a forest of columns. We twisted the end of the staircase so that—to the fury of our neighbours, their lives made hideous by chipping and hammering—it swept in a series of shallow curves, smooth as ripples on sand, into the middle of the black and white hall.

The balustrade must, I said, be different from anything else in the world. The younger Lutyens rose to the occasion. "Leopards," he suggested. "Let's have leopards."

We had them. They were life-size but not life-shaped. Hand-wrought in bronze, but flat as the dictates of contemporary art, they leaped, stalked, galloped and couched up the great curves of the stairs. One-dimensional, they looked like God's first models for the fifth day of Genesis. They lived among primal foliage suggesting—in metal—the jungle. I loved those leopards long after I felt burdened—as Atlas or Sisypus—with the size and greed of the house.

My bedroom was beautiful—but most uncomfortable. Two of the walls were of grey glass shaped into bricks with lead instead of mortar. They were divided into tall, gleaming panels by pilasters of ebony glass, and these were spaced about the other walls, which were silver-grey like the ceiling. The floor was of black marble, with a border of green called 'verde antica'. The back of the bed was an enormous palm-leaf, wrought in silvered bronze to match the smaller leaves which hid the lights. These had come from Portugal, where for centuries they have decorated the altars on Palm Sundays.

Curtains and coverings the colour of apricots in bright sunshine, were reflected in every shining surface. The velvet backs of the chairs were green and embroidered with more heavily embossed conventional palms. It was all very beautiful to look at—and immensely inconvenient, for there was nowhere to put anything, and after a good polishing it was impossible to walk upon the floor. We once lent the house to a newly-married couple. The girl subsequently reduced us to helpless laughter by a description of her embarrassed groom approaching cautiously on all fours, his reflection multiplied in every wall. "Then we couldn't find how to put out the lights," she said. "They poured down on us all night, and whenever we moved, rows and rows of people copied us on every side. It was the most public night anyone has ever spent!"

When Robert Lutyens and I pulled to pieces the old house and rebuilt it with lovely proportions and exaggeration of effect, I must have

been taking myself seriously. For the press chronicled every experiment we made. Headlines were fecund—"House of Dreams. Rosita Forbes a builder. Sun palace. Sleepy stairs and under-sea bath," announced London's *Daily News*. The sober *Glasgow News* announced, "Rosita Forbes, would use more colour. She says we do nothing to counteract the gloom of our drab climate." The *Madrass Mail*, in India, informed its readers that, "instead of employing a firm of decorators, Mrs. Forbes is her own foreman and has engaged to work at her sole direction, builders, electricians, plasterers, plumbers, iron-workers, smiths, glass-workers, carpenters and a Japanese artist and lacquerer." A Chicago paper insisted that a hundred men were working on "the most wonderful dwelling in London", including a cripple who was carving fishes on the bathroom furniture. This was true. He had read about the house and wrote me wistfully from Buckinghamshire to ask for employment. As he could not come to town, I drew lovely, fat, gaping fishes or lean, sardonic ones and sent them to him to copy. Many such people—artists at heart—enjoyed making that house. Crippled soldiers embroidered the palms. A plasterer who hated mass production, made me the most seductive, heavy-eyed owls to stand upon pillars in the gallery. My friendship with Peter Sparks began when I saw exactly the right Buddha seated upon a lotus lily and twelve Chinese lions in his window. "Can I have it at once—now—this minute?" I asked. For I saw exactly where it could—and must—be placed, between red columns in a little gallery looking down over the stairs and the hall to bless and guard our door. "Yes," said Peter.

That is what is so nice about him. He never says, "Won't tomorrow do?" or, "How do you expect to get it into a taxi?"

Year after year I have bought the loveliest porcelains and paintings from the famous 'John Sparks' in Mount Street, treasure-house of thirty Chinese centuries. Peter has helped me lift prodigious Tang priests obstinately shaped, or yards and yards of Chien Lung pictures, with heavenly horses racing all over them, into startled vehicles. Very often he has sat among or underneath the sharp-angled fragility of my new belongings, murmuring, "I'd like to see you don't break them before you arrive——" He is a delightful man, and to-day—in the middle of the war—his dim, golden rooms garnished with history, softly glowing with ancient colours, are much more effective than psycho-analysis. For beauty can heal the spirit. The Chinese craftsmen of two hundred years ago spent a lifetime in creating the rich and delicate loveliness which we now hold in the peaches of happiness and the quaint flickering bats of longevity. They must have loved the birds and flowers they painted with such meticulous care and enjoyed the flat gay figures excessively active upon horses without enough leg, or meditative in arrogant landscapes, devoid of perspective.

The *Daily Herald*, synthesis of each day's 'modernity', published a poem about my house:

*"Going to bed, as I climbed the stair,  
 There were lions and tigers everywhere!  
 There wasn't a passage without a sort  
 Of wild beast that might, though it didn't, snort!  
 And every door, to every room  
 Hid one or more things in the gloom,  
 And the Grown-ups, like Nurses  
 And Aunts, said 'Pooh',  
 But I knew, it was true,  
 And I know it is true—  
 For you'll meet all the terrors that strewed my paths  
 If you go to bed at Mrs. McGrath's.*

*Mrs. McGrath has a wonderful house!  
 But you mustn't have a heart like a mouse  
 If you want to visit her marble floors  
 And her pillars and orange grove walls and doors—  
 Oh, nol to behold that magical hall,  
 You must be as brave as Sir Percival  
 And you mustn't flinch from whatever you see,  
 Whatever you feel, and whatever it be!  
 For on the staircases proud and great  
 There's leopards that prowl and lie in wait,  
 And there isn't a door round which you can peek  
 Without your knees going wobbly weak—  
 For there's Monstrous Creatures in all the hearths  
 When you go to bed at Mrs. McGrath's."*

In actual fact, the 'creatures' were limited to a pair of thin Egyptian cats seated beside the fire in my own sitting-room and a mutton-fat jade elephant fitted as the handle of my door. But Peter Malacrida—brilliant, kind, perverse in the variety of his talents, who could do many things too well—designed me wall-lights which looked like the portals of the Nile temples. They were of glass. Upon the steps, with darkness behind them, stood the different gods of Akhnaton, child of the sun.

With such a house—and after so much publicity—what could we do but entertain. We did so, at intervals, for ten years.

While Robert Lutyens was still recklessly moving the lift and experimenting with the colour of shrimps against sea-water and I was demanding sand yellows instead, Molly Mount-Temple insisted on my going with her to Venice.

There we saw the beginnings of regimentation. Laws and regulations multiplied. It was heavily forbidden to do many harmless things. Two men were not allowed to sit together at Florian's—the famous café in the Piazza of San Marco. I remember one night, Molly and



I wanted to dine alone before going on to some party, so we suggested to the men who were to take us, "You two dine together and pick us up afterwards." They looked horrified. They were in the middle thirties, dark and good-looking. "What do you suppose would be thought of two men—of our age—dining alone, without women?" said Gino Rava, an interesting creature already at odds with Fascism. His passport had been taken away. He was bitter about it, because as a champion ski-er, he wanted to compete at St. Moritz next winter.

Up till then Fascism in Italy had been—on the whole—constructive. The organization of life was more convenient. Travel, food and service had been improved. There was complete security. Everybody was sure of employment. Reasonable wages were obligatory. Hospitals and schools had been modernized. Health became important. So did morality. It is difficult now—in the horror and rage of war—to remember that Fascism, when it was a spiritual reformation as well as a sensible material evolution, transformed Italy from a collection of unhealthy, dilatory, dishonest, backward states, with the clock resolutely stopped, into a hard-working, progressive nation. Young people were given dignity, with security of labour and its rewards. They were taught discipline and self-sacrifice. What they were *not* taught were the essential virtues of personal and international tolerance.

Italian Fascism had in it the Machiavellian theory of the end justifying the means. Hence the murder of the Socialist Matteotti and the gradual filling of those terrible round cells, without angle or window, on the prison isles.

By 1928, when Molly and I were in Venice, Fascist pride was becoming aggressive. Students on holiday made a habit of beating up harmless villagers, whatever their politics. There was no redress for the victims. Authority was becoming too centralized. Local councils were abolished in favour of dictates from Rome. This put too much power into the hands of enthusiasts. The unscrupulous among them insisted on perquisites. Fascist officials were in a position to demand the best of everything—at ridiculously low rates. They got flats for almost nothing, the 'loan' of transport and every other indulgence, because already—in 1928—ordinary people with no particular politics feared the 'black list'. In the Piazza of St. Mark I watched a procession of young people. Sunburned, strong and healthy, they came from some athletic contest, but they were shouting, "A basso Yugo-Slavia!" Down with their neighbour—the composite land of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes across the Adriatic.

## CHAPTER XIX

1928

### *Hungary and the Regent, Admiral Horthy*

FROM VENICE I WENT to Hungary to join Arthur, who was making one of his many official tours from the War Office. During that autumn we saw Central Europe in a ferment. Each country had its own difficulties and thought them insuperable. Each felt itself in danger from its neighbours. Some were bitter over their losses, and others disturbed by their gains. Each was determined to obliterate—as far as possible—the minorities within its borders, lest worse befall. Between the Black Sea and the Rhine, my impressions crystallized. I wrote articles for the *Daily Telegraph*, collecting their material in farms and slums, in factories and eating-houses, with the help of new friends. My last book had just been published in most of the successor states. It brought me into contact with professors and writers. They in turn introduced me to the left wing in politics. So I saw all sides of Central Europe—and I was afraid. For, in spite of the Bank of England's support of international commerce, the small violently nationalist countries which should have formed a Danubian federation to replace the old Austro-Hungarian Empire were stifled by their own narrow frontiers and by the customs and trade barriers they raised in suicidal self-defence. There were only two subjects of conversation among the socialist intellectuals. One was revision of the peace treaties. This was the terror of Roumania, Yugo-Slavia and Czecho-Slovakia, and the ecstatic hope of their neighbours. The other subject was security. Everybody I met, from kings in danger of assassination, to students and unemployed without enough to eat, spoke of security as if it were a dole. It would come as manna from heaven, without contribution, sacrifice or common sense on their part. As I established contact with more and more workers—and dreamers—on the land or in shaken industry, it seemed to me that the whole fabric of Central Europe must tear at the first strong pull.

I shall always like Hungary. It reminds me of England. That is an illogical reason, for I have generally been happiest out of England. But the Puzta plain reminds me a little of Lincolnshire, which is part of my blood and bones. I love riding endlessly across the monotonous flatness, not at all lush, with small, faint flowers among the grass, flocks of geese, brown sheep and shepherds in their white woollen cloaks and leggings. The Puzta is Biblical in its unchanging simplicity. I like to visualize it under that rush of Magyar horsemen which once saved Christian Europe from the war lords of Tartary.

Budapest is romance exactly as depicted in sugar-sweet comedy. The importance of the day is not recognized until it becomes night. Then the cafés blossom along the streets. They are the flower-beds of a heart-rending capital which can be happy without being rich and whose 'Nem Nem Shoha'<sup>1</sup> is a banner rather than a battle-axe.

We arrived at a difficult moment. For Hungary, recovered from the horrors of the red terror spread by Bela Kun, was beginning to realize the extent of her suffering under the Treaty of Trianon. The first plague she had "cured by white compresses". This was the explanation of a socialist author with whom I drank a great deal of excellent coffee. It was smothered with whipped cream. Hungary maybe was as dark and hot under the feudalism delicately assuring the colour and taste of her life. It is difficult to be fair about Hungary, because we—the makers of the Trianon peace treaty—did so much more harm to her than any of her own people.

Budapest is the centre of the Danubian plain and of the network of roads and railways which feed it. Her *raison d'être* as one of the great cities of Central Europe was that she ruled a country self-contained and self-supporting, for the plain is a natural basin, and before the war its cereals fed the surrounding mountains in exchange for their wood and minerals.

Until Germany forced a horrible form of unity upon defenceless Central Europe, the whole system of communication and of supply and demand was dislocated. Producers and consumers were separated by unnatural frontiers. The gold, silver, iron ore and salt, the forests, the industries and the sea-road of Hungary were in the hands of her neighbours, the Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenes and Croats. These had been the tools and pets of Hapsburg Imperialism in its long struggle with the Liberal Hungarian nationalism represented by Rakoczy, Kosuth, and Déak. Yet Budapest remained a spectacular and even a growing city, for she had been forced to house some 800,000 refugees until such time as Europe regains its sense of proportion and inevitably the Danubian plain is reunited.

Meanwhile, life in the capital was in strata. At the bottom were the soup queues of unemployed, whose dole was eight pengös<sup>2</sup> a month. Their ranks included professional men and scientists, university students who could find no possible or impossible job, civil servants from the lost provinces, ex-lawyers and ex-surgeons. At the top were the parasites in the big hotels, manipulators if not creators of industrial strife, and the few—the very few—'idle rich', who, on account of clever Semite ancestors or rich foreign marriages, were still able to entertain.

Trianon outlawed between three and four million Magyars, but it did two things for Hungary. It created a religious Renaissance among

<sup>1</sup> 'Never, never shall we forget.'

<sup>2</sup> Approximately 8s.

the peasants, so that every church was crowded, whether the sermons were in Magyar, German, or Slovak. It forced the Hungarian landowner back to his estates, thus realizing the dream of Count Stephen Szechenye, who in 1830-40 sought to wean his compatriots from the Court of Vienna by introducing racing and the club which is still the centre of sporting life.

By 1928 society in Budapest was reduced to a few families agreeably turning night into day, for the Hungarian has a complex against going to bed. He cannot believe that he has really enjoyed himself unless he comes home with the morning milk.

Magyar Hungary consisted of the aristocracy and the peasantry, who were as conservative and feudal—in fact, as thoroughly aristocratic—as their landlords. The bourgeoisie was chiefly Semite, for all industry and commerce were in the hands of the Jews. To them Hungary owed much of her wealth, for they were the stewards and lawyers of the old magnates. They were not only the shopkeepers and merchants, but the middle-men. As such, they went from village to village in cheap motors, buying peasant produce and distributing it in the towns.

Owing to the Bolshevik régime of Bela Kun, the Hungarian had what would appear to any country which has not so suffered, an exaggerated dislike of the Jew. He saw the latter growing rich at his expense, and discounted the patience, the laborious thrift, the intelligence and the unassertive thoroughness of Judea. Townsman and peasant alike protested that the Jew enriched nobody but himself, for he was sufficiently adaptable to try a dozen different businesses on the way to success whereas the closing of each unsatisfactory venture spelt ruin for its employees. But it is difficult to see what the new Hungary would have done commercially without the money and the industrial brains of Israel.

The possession of land is still the Mecca of the Magyar. To him a few acres on which to breed fat curly-haired pigs with a will of their own, long-horned cattle, and geese—for the feathers which constitute a bridal dower—mean more than the most productive commercial enterprise.

We dined one night in the Regent's hunting castle of Gödollo, hung with every kind of horn and tusk. The conversation was of sport, for the Hungarian is blood-brother to the Englishman, and Admiral Horthy is never so happy as when he can escape for a few days' shooting. Dinner was the quickest meal I have ever eaten outside the palace of the Egyptian King, where, in olden days, a slave stood behind each chair, knowing he would lose at least some skin if the meal were not over within an hour. The Emperor Franz Joseph had the same horror of delay. His servants, remembering Imperial orders, kept an eye on the clock and, if necessary, intervened between cup and lip.

The Regent was once described to me as "so honest that he won't

even pretend to see through a fog". Of medium height, strongly built and forceful, he is a sailor by profession and choice, and therefore direct both in method and in outlook. He is a man of strong character and an equally strong sense of duty, straightforward and very outspoken. His horizon is limited and not at all democratic, but within it he has a clear conception of his duty, and he will not allow himself to be deflected from it by any expedients which might appeal to more typical politicians, or by his own personal predilections.

The strain, I thought, had begun to tell on Madame Horthy. I remember her as beautiful and very gracious, dressed in grey. She has charm, dignity and distinction. Her voice is warm and full of inflections. She greeted us as if she were delighted to see us, and indeed she is interested in all her friends and acquaintances. But that night I thought she had been listening for a long time. What she expected was a shot. Her eyes were kind, gentle and young, but they were also watchful.

The Regent wore naval uniform, spoke English, but said he found French easier. I sat beside him at dinner and he talked about the sea. Each of us tried to find a harbour the other did not know. Hong Kong, Rio, Sydney! We argued about their separate beauties. Then I thought I had won with Vavau in the Tongan Isles, but the Regent retorted with a whole string of islands of which I had never heard. We compromised at last with Kilauea—the house of eternal fire—where the volcano, with hair (of the Goddess Pélé) aflame, is reflected in Hawaiian waters. "You evidently like violence," said the Admiral, "and I enjoy a storm myself, but I like harbours peaceful."

"And your life?" I asked.

"Decidedly so. I am only a fighter when I am on a man-of-war's bridge. That to me is the natural way of fighting."

"You've done all kinds in defence of Hungary."

"For Hungary I would do anything!"

We drank the most delicious Tokay. It reminded me of apricots on an old brick wall. The Regent, laughing, said, "I shall always like the sea best. I am 'sea-sick' on land. But if I can't be on a ship, then I am happiest on my farm. I like horses and dogs and talking to shepherds on the Puzta plain. I hate being surrounded by people who are afraid of what is going to happen to me, although I must say I should not care to be assassinated. You have to be born a king to have the royal indifference to these gentlemen with bombs, or to knives in the back. But I don't expect they'll get me. I hope they won't, for I haven't finished my job."

Towards the end of dinner he said to me, "I shall never be a king or the pretence of a king. I hold Hungary for my King, but I cannot give back anything less than a Hungary free, prosperous and strong." He must have been puzzled, I thought, when the ex-Emperor Carl returned to Budapest in defiance of the Allies and demanded the

throne. "That was the hardest decision I ever had to make," said Horthy, and he looked a little bewildered, as if he were a schoolboy choosing between two sets of rules.

"Hungary or the King," I reflected aloud, and the Regent interrupted. "They ought to be the same."

Several times I heard him say, "I will never take the King's place." He did not live in royal state, either at Gödollo, where he invited his friends to shoot in the surrounding woods, or in the enormous palace at Buda where he contented himself with a wing containing less than a dozen rooms. Whenever he could escape from work or the official ceremonies he reduced to a minimum, he was out in the forest with a gun or among the horses he bred at Kenderes. On his own place there were cattle-sheds and pigsties, grandchildren running about with woolly Hungarian sheep-dogs, peasants in leather coats, to whom the Regent was no more than a popular country landowner, pheasants treated with respect so that they could subsequently be shot, and quantities of foals. "You must come and shoot boar," invited the Regent. "It is the best sport of all. If you like we can go out very early one morning and see if we can get a shot. There is only a second, you know, while the boar crosses a path. You never see him except for that one moment, and he goes so fast you wonder if you *have* seen him." Leaning across the table, he made plans with one of his good-looking sons and with his brother Eugène, a magnificent shot, who had hunted big game all over the world. "Where can Colonel McGrath get a good head?" he asked. "It is still so hot. With you," turning to Baron Zichy, "the stags will all be in velvet, but perhaps with Bethlen,<sup>1</sup> it might be managed. Where is the best chance?" All the men discussed forests and how, on high ground in the mountains, it might be possible for my husband to get a stag. We might have been in any Scottish house. But when we followed Madame Horthy to the drawing-room, that beautiful woman in pale grey with hair already softly grey sat beside a window to which her eyes unconsciously strayed. There was fear in them. Then I realized that—after all—it could not be Scotland.

Like her husband, Madame Horthy is a good judge of character. She talked of neighbouring countries as if they were people, and especially of the chances of a monarchical restoration in Greece. "I hope it'll be soon," she said. "Why?" I asked, for I admired the shrewd intolerant Venezelos, narrow perhaps in his ambitions, since he could find no place for a throne in his Alexandrine Greece, which he hoped to extend over Asia Minor. I expected a serious answer, but Madame Horthy said with a smile, "Well, it would please so many other Kings." Her eyes lit and she looked lovely. "Kings always like more kings—it makes them feel safe," she explained.

<sup>1</sup> Count Bethlen, the Prime Minister.

At that moment there was a shot. It sounded quite near. Madame Horthy stiffened. Her face became as white as the wall behind her, but she went on talking with gentle amusement about her neighbours—countries, not people. There seemed to me no reason why she should not do so because a gamekeeper had—I supposed—shot at a hawk or a stoat. Then I remembered the methods of Bela Kun, and I understood why everybody was looking at the door.

White-lipped, Madame Horthy said that I would enjoy Transylvania where Queen Marie of Roumania was building herself yet another castle. She did not remind me that the land and the people had long been Hungarian. Suddenly the door opened. An officer came into the room. He came quickly and quietly with a reassuring phrase on his lips, and the blood came back into the face of the lady in grey. Everyone relaxed. "It was a mistake," said a girl, very beautiful in white satin. Madame Horthy looked at us all blankly as if she could not yet focus her eyes.

So it *was* a gamekeeper, I thought.

In Hungary, the peasants said that Horthy was their luck. "He will get back for us all that we have lost," they insisted. In the little wooden houses, scrubbed clean and bleached by the sun, with geese walking in and out of the door, goose liver in the larder, and goose feathers plumping cumulus clouds of pillows, they talked as if he belonged to them.

Count Bethlen, the then Prime Minister and always a force in Hungary, was as great a contrast as it is possible to imagine. Tall, slight, with a very quiet, unaffected manner, he had considerable charm, but he did not give the impression of a strong personality. His tastes were simple, his intelligence and political ability undoubted. Deprived of his Transylvanian property, Count Bethlen had taken a farm near the Croatian border. There he gave us lunch in a small, whitewashed room, with grapes hanging over the door.

In common with the other enemy Powers, Hungary was specifically promised at the Peace Treaty that her disarmament would be a prelude to that of Central Europe.

Ten years had passed, and Hungary was still at the mercy of her neighbours. Budapest was within range of Czecho-Slovakia's guns. Her two remaining coal-mines were within a few hundred yards of hostile frontiers. Her army was limited to 35,000, without heavy artillery or aeroplanes. Yet she was supposed to be able to treat reasonably and on equal terms, concerning such obvious necessities as free passage to the sea at Fiume, with her three military neighbours, who were in possession of fully-equipped armies.

The situation in 1928 was already very difficult. Admiral Horthy and the landowners pinned their faith to England. They would have liked an English king. The peasants looked no further than their

own landlords. From these they asked miracles and were not content with mere loaves and fishes.

Change was imminent, for a new democracy was breeding in the universities. There, education intended for a pre-war population of twenty-two millions with wide industrial and professional opportunities was concentrated on a people reduced to eight million, wholly agricultural and without other prospects. Here was insurance for any number of wars, and material which Nazi Germany was quick to use. Not Hitler's mysticism or his violent territorial greed made certain the struggle of to-day, but the need of every country in Europe for the prosperity lost at Versailles. When Britain had not the courage to revise the treaties condemned by the cool wisdom of Clemenceau and General Smuts, Germany had her chance. She took it. The security of her new order seemed to dismayed and distraught countries, exhausted by twenty years of spiritual and material starvation, to be their only hope. They were wrong, but can they be blamed for the choice? No alternative was offered.

As soon as we crossed the frontier between Hungary and Roumania, we found ourselves among a host of improbabilities. If Transylvania ever has a king of her own, it could be no one but Hans Andersen. Only he could keep suitable state in her goblin castles, which look as if they were originally created to illustrate his fairy-tales.

Transylvania is no more Roumanian than she is Hungarian. For seven years in the sixteenth century, under Michael the Brave, she was united to the Dacian-Latin principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. At other periods of her stormy history she was ruled by her own princes, and for a few years before the Ausgleich put her completely into the power of Hungary, she was, to a considerable extent, autonomous within the old Austrian Empire.

Sentimentally she leaned towards Roumania, chiefly because the Magyarization campaign had been irritating to the last degree. The Hungarian magnates despised the Roumanian gentry. If the peasants wished for education, they found their names changed from, let us say, Ione Miku to Kitchi Janosh. In that Magyarized edition they had to go through life if they wanted their certificates and diplomas to be of any good to them.

Officials and civil servants were either Hungarians or Hungarianized. As for the illiterate peasantry of either nationality, they were certainly no worse oppressed than the Roumanians across the border. They were serfs, without any paramount rights, but sufficiently prosperous, because in those days of big estates, agriculture was flourishing.

The best farmers were always Saxons. They were the descendants of colonists brought in by the Magyars of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to make a frontier against the Turks. When Transylvania was handed over to Roumania by the Peace Treaty, the Saxon colonies remained unchanged. In 1928, their villages were still the cleanest and



most prosperous. Their fields gave the biggest crops and their animals were always the healthiest in the neighbourhood. Inside their large, two-storied houses, painted cream colour, were grand pianos and sardines. These were the final expressions of luxury among farmers.

In much-disputed Transylvania there were, in those days, five million people, of whom the three hundred thousand most effective were these Saxon settlers. No Jew could make a living among them. Notice-boards often announced that Hebrews were unwelcome.

Roumania was, for me, the beginning of the Balkan spirit, sturdy, proud, intransigent and simple, great in its work on the land and in its endurance of war. The quality of its fighting, I think, depends on how much its officers have been softened by the usual life of capitals.

I remember Roumania as a pale land of burned earth and dusty roads reflecting a washed-out sky. So the vivid colour of the women's aprons and of the tassels swinging at the tips of oxen's horns, the gold of corn cobs drying under the eaves, was particularly arresting.

The paramount impression which remained with me after some three thousand kilometres of country roads was of primitive wagons, drawn by horses, oxen, and water-buffalo—generally with a foal or a calf running loose—swarming at all angles over tracks inches deep in dust. The wagons were filled with pitifully dry hay and maize stalks, or with dung.

Perched all over them, like birds, were a worn and docile peasantry, inured to the bad harvests which jeopardized their living. All around them dogs, geese, and pigs sprawled across the road. The whole picture was intermittent, emerging for a minute from the dust which, owing to the unprecedented drought, was thick as a London fog, to disappear again in the cloud raised by the next motor, amidst as much noise as a fog-bound fleet at sea.

The intelligentsia, watching the earth harden and the trees die, talked of the steppes spreading southward. The illiterate summoned the local sorceress. To the rhythm of her incantations, the chosen women, dressed in leaves, danced a slow, springing measure to represent growth, while the villagers watered them with anything handy, from a hose to a coffee-pot.

The population of the plains depended for sustenance on maize, and that year the dead crop rattled in the wind like castanets.

As soon as we crossed the River Prut into Bessarabia, we had to remember we were not in Russia. The province had changed hands after the last war. It was governed by Bucharest, but it talked Russian and it looked Russian. Stone walls were reminiscent of the Tartar. The peasants were just like the Moujiks across the Soviet frontier. The men were huge, stalwart creatures, gay in spite of their extreme poverty, gallant-looking and upright. They wore long sheepskin coats which increased their bulk. The women were shapeless in dark clothes with shawls over their heads.

Progress through the villages was slow because the roads were only ruts between the houses, and every horse had hysterics at sight of our car. Suddenly there was a steep hill and the whole landscape changed. Trees and hamlets disappeared. On the mighty plains was born the Russian wind which went with us to the Dniester. A flock of toy windmills crowned the horizon. A procession of grain-laden carts wound upward to the communal mills, set so close together that they were like artificial flowers bunched in a gale.

Hotin is in the triangle then formed by the Polish, Russian, and Roumanian frontiers. It seemed to me the edge of the world. Straggling offices and barracks were splayed between a gypsy encampment—its tents battered by the wind from the steppes—and the first Eastern bazaar whose one-storied, open-fronted booths were stuck side by side like the cells of a honeycomb. Their roofs of dark wooden slats were crumpled into holes. They sagged at all angles, so that it looked as if the whole place were slipping shabbily into the river.

Bessarabia lay in the path of migrating Scythians, Goths and Vandals, of Slavs, Huns, Bulgars, Tartars, and last of all, of the Jews flying from Northern persecutions. Each of these races must have left its blood in the dark bazaars of Hotin. There men live in leaking cabins scarcely fit for animals, and the heavy Russian type, with glance direct and deep, yet curiously inverted, broods at the counters heaped with what seems little better than refuse.

We stood on the cliff above the Dniester at sunset. Far below us a boy fished with the triangular net of the Judean apostles. There was a crescent moon. A cluster of inarticulate soldiery loomed against the old bastions which defended sixteenth-century Moldavia against Turk and Tartar. The massive walls of Stephen's Castle, ruined and bat-haunted, were etched against the slow, grey river, which has neither ford nor bridge.

A lean Russian, in decent rags, pointed across the Dniester. "Russie," he told us, his gaunt figure moved by some indescribable emotion. To this moment I do not know if he spoke with love, pity, hate or pride. Like all his race, he was emotional and dramatic. I felt something ought to have happened. There should have been a sudden, solitary shot. . . . There was not.

That night we slept in the office of the Mayor. Outside, in the corridor, sentries tramped up and down. As an afterthought a beautiful young officer, covered with gold braid, thrust into my husband's arms a naked chamber-pot. Arthur, in staff uniform, received it without a smile. But how we laughed afterwards!

At Neamtzu we visited the Abbot Nicodemus, who lived in a Red Riding Hood cottage among the pines, with a garden full of flowers. He confronted us with an enormous bowl of strawberry jam flanked by glasses of water on a silver tray. After some embarrassment we

discovered that we were supposed to eat a generous portion neat and then rinse the solitary spoon.

We slept in curtainless white cells, beneath pictures of bygone abbots and monks militant.

In the morning we saw the distribution of food in memory of the dead. On such an anniversary it is the custom to put plates of special cakes made of wheat and honey, sprinkled with nutmeg or almonds, outside the precincts, sometimes at the edge of the forest. Whoever likes may take them. Dives distributes fifty to a hundred of these gay tin platters heaped with food, Lazarus perhaps only one, but the spirit is the same.

At the end of the simple ceremony the peasants kissed the robes of the abbot, or pressed their lips to his footsteps as he passed. In return, he wished them the universal greeting of that patient, humble, trustful Roumania, which puts a Calvary beside each well and a cross on the first timbers of each new house—"The Saviour walk with you."

## CHAPTER XX

1928

### *Roumania and Queen Marie*

WHEN WE LEFT Transylvania, we had crossed an invisible frontier. For Roumania is the beginning of a simplicity of living, Asian rather than European. Perhaps this East begins more exactly upon the great plains in Hungary, where the shepherds and the goose girls exhibit a fatalism unusual in the sophisticated and restless lands devoted to modern politics. But we became conscious of an oriental attitude to life when we looked out on to the first station platform in Roumania and saw that hybrid figure so familiar in the Levant—dark-haired and swarthy, with nose more or less hooked and shirt outside his trousers.

Bucharest is a fragment of Paris. It has the elegancies of the Grands Boulevards. The beautiful and charming women are sure of themselves and of their effect on men. The popular sport is the interminable intensity of political and intellectual hairsplitting so disliked by arrogant National Socialism. But Roumania is the beginning of the vast tormented simplicity of the Balkans. They should be happy agricultural peoples, federated in some sensible manner, with sufficient autonomy, to satisfy their exaggerated—and strenuously cultivated—nationalisms. They should *not* be separatist—and separated by artificial frontiers and by barriers of customs. They should not be allowed to suffer from territorial indigestion or starvation. "There is something very Balkan about all the Balkans," said a cynical writer. He was referring to Yugo-Slavia's determination to absorb Croatia, to

Bulgaria's desperate hunger for her lost Dobrudja, to Roumania's fear of losing what she had gained at Versailles, to Greece's insistence on keeping Bulgaria from the sea, to Macedonia's determination to be a separate entity, and to Albania's illogical existence.

We saw the best Balkan qualities in the life of the various peasantries, far from the new or old capitals. The country folk of Roumania, Bulgaria, Serbia, or Croatia, indeed of every original state, including some which no longer exist, were equally laborious and thrifty. Their needs were few. They were accustomed to hard living. They would be capable of hard fighting. They were content with the land, until their sons and grandsons were tempted by better education into black coats and offices. Then they learned new needs and new words in which to express them. Politics and discontent became synonymous. Progress meant leaving the primitive security of farming for tentative industrial development. Nationalism had been a simple thing of soil ownership and the living it ensured. In the towns—with the uneasy marriage of bureaucracy and the new middle classes—it became embittered by varying 'isms' representing extremes of social consciousness. But still in the country, one land drifted imperceptibly into another. The people talked as they had done for a thousand years. They belonged to their own villages and families, rather than to the countries established or destroyed by treaty.

During our stay in Roumania, we met a number of the beautiful women who, as queens and princesses, were pawns on the Balkan chessboard. Occasionally they proved themselves sufficiently tempestuous to be credited with the dashing moves of knights or bishops. Queen Marie herself check-mated a number of kings. To her, we brought a letter of introduction from Eileen Ghyka, companion of my play-days in Rome, Paris and London just after the last war. Eileen had won the Croix de Guerre with palms and a *citation d'armée* for her work as an ambulance driver at the French front. She was a vivid figure in the highly-coloured canvas of 1919 England, when everybody had much to forget. Never have there been such startling individualities, carnival bright and brittle. They disappeared as they shed their motley. In a year or two they were forgotten—or discredited for strange habits and outrageous loves.

But Eileen, brilliant and avid of life, with a brain and the wits to use it, had married Matila Ghyka, whose ancestors crowned the first emperors of Byzantium. He was then a naval officer. Later he became Roumanian Minister in London. He is one of the most erudite men in Europe. When he wrote a mathematical study of the Fourth Dimension, *The Times* could find nobody sufficiently learned to review his work. The literary editor appealed to a scientific colleague in Paris, for whom it happened that Matila reviewed. The Frenchman had a sense of humour. He sent Prince Ghyka his own book to criticize for the august London *Times*. When I asked Eileen why

she married him, she replied, "With him I could never—for one moment—be bored."

"If you are going to Roumania," said both Ghykas at once, "of course you must meet the Queen. Whatever you think, she is a very significant part of the country."

So when we reached Sinaia, by way of a good many other countries, we went to the extraordinary German-Gothic hunting castle which King Ferdinand had set among the woods and hills. Madame Lahovary, accustomed to the Queen's interest in the friends of her friends, said, "Oh, no, you can't go away. I'm sure Her Majesty will want to see you. And tea—of course, you must have tea."

So far as I remember we did *not* have it because Queen Marie was so interested in talking about her friends all over Europe—and especially of her son-in-law George<sup>1</sup> who, she said, "was out of a job and therefore a good man wasted"—that she forgot to give us anything to eat or drink. We sat on a couch covered with leopard skins and embroideries, in that Hollywood-esque castle which suited but did not at all overpower the Queen, beside a tea-table laden with agreeable things to eat and Marie—the beautiful, warm-hearted, preposterous woman who delighted in being a queen—forgot all about it. She had the most wonderful hands I have ever seen. The knuckles did not project at all. The fingers were long and ivory-coloured. The shape of them showed strength. She wore an enormous sapphire and two pearls. Her dress was like a mediaeval abbess's robe, black and close-fitting with a long train. When she caught my hand and drew me impetuously after her into another sitting-room furnished as an oratory and then into her bedroom, I had difficulty in not falling over her skirt. I have a memory of fabulous mosaics, of skins, crucifixes, rosaries, jewelled ikons, and a profusion of—was it dahlias, chysanthemums, or marigolds? It was some vigorously orange flower, for that was the Queen's favourite colour. "It makes me feel warm and well," she said with emphasis. Her speech flowed with the energy of a mill-race. She was already, I suppose, on the way to being an old woman, but age had nothing whatever to do with her. She was the very spirit of enjoyment. "I have had such a lot of happiness," she said, "and battles too, of course, but that is all part of living." Her smile was a flame. She had no small, irritating poses. It may be that all her life was an act for which she staged a suitably dramatic background, but long before I met her, the part had become natural to her. It is customary now to criticize this English-and-Russian-born Balkan Queen for her love of display and her love of being admired, for her extravagance, her political ambitions, her business deals and her plain speaking. But she did a great deal for the Allies by helping to bring Roumania into the last war and still more for her own country during its disastrous fight. She played a considerable part at the time of the

<sup>1</sup> King George of Greece.



peace treaties, when Roumanian frontiers were extended to cover parts of Hungary and Bulgaria. Above all she was the sort of queen the peasants liked. They looked upon her as a fairy-tale, and when she wanted to build yet another Hans Andersen castle, they used to cut and haul the timber for it as a gift. "Why do you all like her so much?" I asked the mayor of a mountain town. He looked at me as if I had questioned the divinity of Bethlehem's Mary. "Because she is so good," he replied.

As we swept through the rooms of that very much ornamented and carved castle at Sinaia, Queen Marie talked of her Greek son-in-law. "My daughter and he don't get on. It is a pity, but they are both rather obstinate. That is quite a good quality in a king, but not in a queen. George should never have left Greece—once you leave a country you are forgotten. The great thing is to stay in the capital and do things." This so exactly represented the philosophy of our hostess that I could not help laughing. "But it's true," she insisted. "Kings have got to be seen and talked about. It doesn't much matter what they do so long as it's a lot. Half our business in life is to provide conversation for our subjects."

During that same visit to Sinaia, we saw something of Princess Helen who had been King Carol's Queen.<sup>1</sup> Her small son was then Michael the King, and she kept as much as possible in the background. I remember her always in the Roumanian national dress, white and red, intricately embroidered. She bore an infinity of misfortune with dignity and did not talk about it at all. She was hospitable and kind. My recollection is of a young, slight, sad woman with a well-shaped head and admirable features. She was definitely a lady of quality.

Like her irresistible mother, the Kaiser's sister, Queen Sophie of Greece, with whom we spent an afternoon at Sinaia, she talked with the utmost simplicity. "Of course my brother George is unhappy," she said with acquiescent grief. "How could he be anything else? If you are brought up and trained to be a king, you are no use for any other kind of work." She pursued the subject as if, for the moment, she had forgotten our presence. "Being a king means you are in a cage. You think you dislike it. You are impatient of its restrictions, but it is—I suppose—a protection. When it is gone, there is nothing else left for you." She smiled, but it was not very gay. "I suppose we are like all other spoiled creatures kept in cages. Let us out and we are defenceless. We don't know how to behave in a predatory world. We are too different and we cannot forget it." In those days I thought of Princess Helen as lovely and sad. But when I met her a few years later—an exile in London with her late husband reinstated on the throne, she said to me in a tired voice, "Sinaia seems like another life. What aeons ago it was, and what happiness I had!"

The next time I heard of King George was in Epirus. I had been

<sup>1</sup> Princess Helen of Greece, married to King Carol of Roumania.

making a colour film in Albania, and from that charming Southern town whose name I never can spell—it is something like Aigiocastro—I crossed a few more hills into Greece. The peasants were not pleased to see us. They did not care for foreigners and they refused us lodging until I talked to them of their King whom I had met in London. The response was extraordinary. There were smiles on every face. The sturdy, independent farmers could not do enough for us. They placed piles of food and their best mattresses at our disposal. They talked as if the King were one of their own family. When we left they wanted us to take him gifts of eggs, chickens, meat on skewers, and all sorts of other perishable things.

That same autumn I met King George of Greece a good deal, both in London and at country houses where he shot. I found him a reserved and sensible young man, German rather than Danish in character. For he has courage, foresight, obstinacy, political tact at times, and a good sense of values, but none of the charm which his cousins have brought to the courts of Europe. He appears to be slow of thought and speech, but he is well informed and practical, and he does not attempt the impossible. He can be a good friend and also a 'good' enemy. The natural result of his upbringing, as nephew of the Kaiser, is that he admires success, efficiency and good organization. He does not jump to conclusions, or precipitate himself into untenable positions. He thinks hard, makes up his mind, and then it is difficult to make him alter it, even if he is wrong. I should say his opinions were hard and fast, but no man ever adapted himself better to circumstances disastrous and prolonged. As an exile in London, he behaved with unimpeachable dignity and sound good sense. I remember when I asked him, at twenty-four hours' notice, to come to a party we were giving for our very new house, he said, "Yes, I'd love to, but no red carpet, please. I'm out of a job, so the less notice anybody takes of me the better pleased I am."

## CHAPTER XXI

1928

### *Bulgaria and King 'Boris*

THE SIMPLICITY OF BULGARIA is her most arresting quality. Owing to tyre trouble, we spent our first night in an inn like any Eastern khan. Double gates gave access to a walled court, wherein carts and merchandise were ranged. On three sides there was a primitive stable full of oxen and horses, all adorned with bright blue beads as a protection from the evil eye. Against the fourth side leaned an uncertain house, the second story bulging outwards on curved wooden beams. From



this the guests overflowed into a series of open-fronted cubicles above the stables.

We were part of the overflow. In the next compartment there was a gypsy family numbering perhaps a dozen. The whole night through they wailed and bellowed in different minor keys. No protest could stop them. Towards dawn they had worked themselves into a frenzy which shook the whole structure. It then appeared that they had buried one of their company the previous day. The wake was to prevent his spirit returning to haunt them.

Every Bulgarian town has its mosque, a red or white clay structure, with roofs scarcely more domed than a soup-plate, and a slender, pointed minaret challenging the sky. Under five hundred years of Turkish rule these were the only spires allowed, so the old churches are indistinguishable from the flat-roofed houses by which they are surrounded. In fact, south of the Danube the whole country has a compressed appearance, for the neat, tiled houses are squat and square. They are buried eave-deep among trees and lost in the wonder of these green patches amidst the barren downs.

Bulgaria is essentially a peasant democracy. There is only one class, though a portion of it may be richer or temporarily more prominent owing to industrial or political employment. Eighty per cent of the land is owned by the peasants, who breed enormous families to farm it, or band themselves into small village co-operatives in order to buy machinery. Most of the threshing is done by oxen treading out the corn or by hand-flailing with huge wooden whips.

Normally the man rides and the woman walks behind carrying the baby, but if the bundle, rigidly swaddled in quilted cotton, is held proudly on the saddle, it must be a son. "Of course, I take special care of him," says the father. "He will help me in the fields."

Every Bulgar is a natural democrat. He knows no other standard. Simple, shrewd, unresponsive, obstinate and tenacious, he has the charm of all courageous and laborious people. It has been said of him that "he has all the admirable and none of the lovable virtues"! He never wastes a penny. He eats bread and vegetables, with occasional eggs and sheep's cheese. Chicken is for Sundays, and meat for rare holidays. Cooking is considered waste of time, the women being better employed in the fields or at the loom. The family wealth is its store of home-made clothes, carpets and cushions—all of heavy woollen stuffs embroidered in gay colours.

The peasant character is the greatest asset of a State which depends on agriculture, and Bulgaria has succeeded in capitalizing this by means of compulsory labour.<sup>1</sup> All over the country we saw camps of grey-clad State workers hewing timber or building bridges, making roads and railway lines. Some were hurriedly constructing rows of wooden

<sup>1</sup> There is a labour tax, levied on each household. The men work so many days free in the service of the State.

shanties for 20,000 families made homeless by the last earthquake.

At Varna, we stayed with the Stancioffs. They are great friends of King Boris, and he used to describe them as "the most delightful family in Europe".

Mr. Stancioff had been for a long time Bulgarian Minister in London. His wife was a Frenchwoman, who had come to Sofia as lady-in-waiting to the Bourbon princess married to King Ferdinand. One daughter, Nadejda, espoused a Scot called Sir Kay Muir, and ceased to be the 'stormy petrel of the Balkans'. But she brought all Europe to Blair Drummond. In seven languages she interpreted the needs of the Balkans—to themselves and to Whitehall. She showed a masterly toleration for everyone except Titulesco, the Roumanian premier who cut Bulgaria into pieces at Versailles and who considered himself "the cleverest statesman in Europe—except perhaps Venezelos".

A younger Stancioff girl, 'Chou' Guépin, tawny gold and leonine, is the wife of a good-looking Dutchman, representing his country's oil interests in U.S.A. The third might have been Queen of Bulgaria had not the national law ordained a royal marriage. They are a remarkable family. Staying with them at Varna on the Black Sea—next door to the King's summer palace—was like having intimate connection with a map of Europe.

It was Feo—Egeria of a throne hardly yet established—who sent us to see King Boris. I remember the first thing we talked about was the 'sociable' which stood in the middle of the royal drawing-room at Varna. It was shaped like an S and covered with shiny, stiff yellow satin. The King laughed. "When I was a child," he said, "I used to sit beside my mother and reach up to talk into her ear. I remember then I thought of the yellow seat as a boat. It seemed to me very fine and as I don't like change, I expect the 'sociable', as you call it, will always remain in the same place at Varna."

Before his marriage in 1930,<sup>1</sup> I thought of the young King Boris as the loneliest man in Europe. His mother, a Princess of Bourbon-Parma, was dead, his father, King Ferdinand, in exile, and he himself a bachelor. I asked him why he had not married. He replied, "My seat is far too dangerous for me to ask anyone to share it."

The Bulgarians are fighters born, but they are not courtiers. As a Scottish chieftain among his clansmen, so King Boris lived among thrifty, hard-working, straight-talking individualists.

"I must be their familiar friend before I can be their king," he said to me at Karlova Bania. My husband and I had motored out from Philippopolis to spend the afternoon with him. I remember an open door in a white wall, cows in the road outside, no equerry or guard. A slight, dark man, whose good looks and eager intelligence caused their owner to look much younger than his years, ran out of the charm-

<sup>1</sup> To Princess Giovanna of Italy.

ing farm-house to kiss my hand as I got out of the motor-car. It was the King. He left me no time to curtsy before leading us both into the sitting-room and saying simultaneously that it was too fine to be indoors. "If you want to see the real Bulgaria, let us go and talk to some of my friends in the village," suggested H.M. The King was proud of the gift he had for making friends.

"There is no man in the country to whom I cannot talk as an equal," he insisted.

The most hardened succumbed to his charm—Comintern agitators or Comitadjis as readily as the peasants.

My husband and I were equally conscious of it, even when upset in a ditch of the Balkan mountains. The King had insisted on taking us out motoring. A long open car appeared, apparently without being ordered. The King took the wheel and I sat beside him. My husband, an A.D.C. and the chauffeur piled into the back. Off we went along dusty white roads. Delighted peasants waved to us as if we were at once their children and their gods. High up into the hills we climbed.

"If I weren't a king I could always earn my living as a chauffeur, couldn't I?" said H.M., taking corners at full speed. "But I'm not certain I wouldn't have chosen to be an engine-driver," he reflected, laughing. "That must be a great life. I often drive my own train . . ." At that moment a lumbering ox-wagon, which seemed to go on for ever, lurched round a corner on the wrong side of the road. There seemed to be no space left at all. Supposing collision inevitable, I shut my eyes. But King Boris contrived the impossible. With presence of mind and audacity he turned the car almost upside down into a ditch. Unperturbed the King crawled out, followed by the rest of us. In a minute or two he was working with the other men to extricate the car.

By birth and breeding King Boris should have been a keen and subtle intellectual, for he was a direct descendant of St. Louis and of the splendid 'Sun King'. But, although he was a good conversationalist in eight languages, with a thorough knowledge of political and diplomatic history, he was not particularly interested in art, sculpture or literature. He loved music, especially Wagner's, which he once said made him feel "both sad and triumphant". By the abdication of his father King Ferdinand, immediately after the last war, he inherited a disillusioned, impoverished and defeated, but still courageous country. At the age of twenty-four, he had to forge his own armour. It must have cost him a great deal to appear unmoved by so many difficulties and disasters, by plots, destruction and murder within his own distraught land. But before his marriage with Princess Giovanna of Italy, which set a seal on his popularity, the King had learned how to master his own life. He had also created a national stability which lasted until Hitler destroyed the Balkans. With King Alexander of Yugo-Slavia,

he planned the fullest co-operation. Their first official meeting was sensational. It did much to establish peace between two warrior peoples who for centuries had fought each other as a matter of course. The Yugo-Slavian monarch went to it in a bullet-proof waistcoat. The precaution was unnecessary. King Boris, unarmed, stood always a little in front of his guest. Thus, with his own body, he protected the man on whom he counted for the consolidation of his peace projects in Macedonia—the Ireland of the Balkans.

Mr. Banatz, the Yugo-Slavian shipowner who yearly played host to the Duke and Duchess of Kent, told me that while the plans for this momentous visit were being arranged, King Boris summoned his Commander-in-Chief who would be in the royal car on official occasions. "Should King Alexander be assassinated in our country, remember I must die too," King Boris said to him. "You must give me your word of honour that you will shoot me yourself. So the attack will appear to have been made on me, not on our guest, and there will be no international crisis."

I do not know whether this tale has been exaggerated by appreciative repetition. But it is indicative of the character of the man. He was sensitive, logical and opinionated. He held out as long as he could against the pressure of Germany and his own Ministers. Year after year he appealed to our Foreign Office for those diplomatic gestures which would have raised a barricade of commercial interests between Berlin and Sofia. But Roumanian oil loomed larger than Bulgarian tobacco. So opportunity was lost. It was no doubt a difficult problem—but not so insoluble as that which confronted King Boris in April 1941. Then Hitler delivered his ultimatum. It was—"Immediate passage for German troops through Bulgaria, or—within twenty-four hours your three chief cities, Sofia, Philippopolis and Varna will be obliterated by German bombers." The King could not even postpone his decision. The months through which he had contrived to delay and interfere with Hitler's plans were at an end. He had neither planes, tanks or guns to defend his country. We could send nothing to his help. King Boris had no choice. Yet—with what amounted to German occupation of his capital—he succeeded in reducing to a minimum its efficacy as a tool of National Socialism. Unafraid, he said "No" to Hitler whenever he had any chance of making the negative effective. Unfortunately for our superbly heroic allies, the Greeks, Bulgaria has always wanted the port of Dedeagatch and an opening to the Aegean. So there was a ready-made reason for Sofia's aggressions against indomitable Greece.

On the flood-tide of national ambition—always directed against Serbs and Hellenes—King Boris might have been a straw. Yet I think he did his best to limit disaster in the Balkans. My husband and I happened to be motoring with him in the country almost immediately after a Comintern attempt had been made to blow him and his

Government sky-high while they were all worshipping in the Cathedral at Sofia. Dusk fell while we were still far from Philippopolis where we had an evening engagement. Suddenly King Boris stopped the car. "It'll be quicker if you go straight on from here. I'll walk home across the fields," he said. Naturally, we protested. The equerry in attendance was already half out of the car, but King Boris told him to get back. "It's all right," he said. "I'll have an opportunity to talk to some of the villagers on the way." Lifting his cap, he smiled, waved a hand, and was off into the twilight.

The last we saw of the King that evening was a slender figure striding through cows and dust, saluting the homeward-bound peasants who turned to stare after him.

In the years just before the war, King Boris visited England as often as possible. Especially he liked Scotland, for it reminded him of his own mountains. He was a great friend of three generations of our Royal Family. After his first visit to Balmoral—while the late King George was still alive—he told us how delighted he had been by Queen Mary's spontaneous kindness. "She kissed me on both cheeks—it was so charming of her. I felt for a moment as if I had found my mother."

At that time, he used to laugh about the political complexities of Bulgaria. "My people are pro-Russian," he would say. "My Ministers are pro-German and my wife pro-Italian. I am the only neutral."

## CHAPTER XXII

1928

### *We Lose a Fortune*

IT WAS IN SOFIA, capital of peasant Bulgaria, where nobody can by any stretch of the imagination be called rich and where nearly everyone is exceedingly poor, that Arthur and I learned we had lost all our money. Like the rest of the world, we had been gambling on that beautiful, illogical boom which crashed in the autumn of '28. Our Balkan journey had been punctuated by rumours of disaster. We should have cut our losses, but in us both there is an odd combination of laziness and over-confidence which makes it difficult for us to believe the worst will happen. On that occasion it did. We had been playing the market on margin. Suddenly our pet counter—American Celanese—slid downwards with the velocity of an avalanche. With it went our small fortune.

That particular morning rain spattered on grey roofs and cobbles. We had had a disagreeable night journey and arrived at a grim hotel

before anyone was sufficiently awake to make coffee. There would be a telegram, we knew, at the Legation, but ten o'clock was surely the earliest permissible hour for a call.

Time dragged. There was no hot water for baths. The butter accompanying bedraggled rolls was rancid. I apologized repeatedly—and irritatingly—for having chosen the wrong hotel. Arthur said it did not matter. We could eat at a restaurant.

At half-past nine we walked to the Legation. A clerk handed over the telegram. It was worse than we expected. Arthur laughed. "Well, that's over," he said in a casual voice and thanked the clerk.

Out into the rain we tramped. I do not know what Arthur felt, but he showed nothing at all. I was so sick I could hardly speak—but that may have been partly the result of sitting up all night in a crowded train and of the worn-out breakfast. How we spent the rest of the morning I do not know. Arthur had already decided to leave the Army. I hated the idea and was doubtful if he would like being in the City, wherein a successful brother had promised support. Wet and cold, I was quite sure I would never write another book. Nobody would read it if I did. And we had just bought a large and obstinate London house! Robert Lutyens was in the middle of extravagant decoration, altering everything into something else.\* That house would eat coal. It would insist on servants. It would demand repairs. It was intolerable. I felt—like some million others in the same situation—that this should *not* have happened to *us*. Why does one always think of oneself as being privileged and of one's own family in italics? It is perhaps a form of protective colouring. Without it we might not rise to those moments of achievement which are made easier by a subconscious and wholly unreasonable assurance of security. Fortunately, the average person is convinced that he is too ordinary and inconspicuous to deserve the worst of Fate. In Sofia I was dismayed and hurt by Fate's perspicacity.

Wandering about the city which has never since been clear in my mind, we came to a restaurant. It was early for lunch. The waiter was indignant and the place empty. From a menu which we did not understand we selected such a strange combination of dishes that the man's eyebrows arched into his neatly polished hair. Soup, encumbered with scraps of fat, was set in front of us. I said, "How odd. It looks like an operating-room. Oh, darling, nothing really matters except being together. And that awful house! I could not mind less about the money." Simultaneously I shed several tears into the soup. Arthur was enormously comforting—and I went on being hurt because it was so hard on him. I thought life was behaving disgracefully. For I could always travel off the edge of the map where there was not any giving or taking of money. But he would be in London, where it mattered out of all proportion. How fiercely one longs to give toys to the people one loves—generally when they want something much

more important and grown-up. The waiter was sorry for me. He felt he must do something to help. So he told me the name of the soup—in Bulgarian. It sounded like a cannonade.

Bulgaria led us naturally into Turkey. We stayed at the Embassy in Constantinople with that most elegant of Ambassadors, Sir George Clerk. He was very popular and must by this time have become accustomed to being liked. For in Prague he had been equally successful. Nobles—shelved with the litter of feudalism to make way for the Republic's spring cleaning—had enjoyed his parties and asked him to their shoots. The new Ministers, very shy and uncertain, had as much happiness under his roof as they could conscientiously endure. In return they took his wise advice. Sir George looked the part he played. Nobody could possibly have mistaken him for anything but an Ambassador. He could deal felicitously with kings and revolutionaries. The nearest he came to defeat was at the unwashed hands of an archaeologist I had gathered in Asia Minor, during Atatürk's war with the Kurds, and planted—uninvited—in the middle of an august Embassy lunch, where he disagreed with everyone in a voice outrageous as the sentiments he vented.

Dodo Hanbury joined us in Pera. Across the water Stamboul was always beautiful. The mosques which look like soap bubbles blown out of the Golden Horn, floated in early autumn clouds. Sometimes only the tips of their minarets were visible. We drove along the Bosphorus and watched the little boats sailing in raw blue. Sea and sky were the same colour. In Stamboul we wandered through the great bazaars. With the passing of the Caliphate, Turkey's links with Asia had worn thin. There was less merchandise in the markets, which have the solemnity of cathedral aisles. Under the high vaulted roofs, colour was subdued. European clothes had taken the place of turbans and flowing trousers. The women had begun to unveil. They disliked it very much.

I had some introductions to Turkish families. They were hospitable and eager to talk about the new uncomfortable ways, so I spent a good deal of time in their houses. The older women complained there was no privacy. They had been accustomed to the service of slaves and to going freely, wherever they wished, secure from observation, unrecognizable under the veil. They hated being exposed to the public gaze and were alarmed by the penury which attended domestic reorganization under the new régime. Girls were enthralled by the promises of education, but they regarded it as a goal in itself. The university was to them as the mosque to their ancestors—and Kemal was the Prophet who had freed them. Unemployment, of course, was rife, except among manual labourers. For Turkey was in the same state as the Balkans. Education was ahead of opportunity. There were not nearly enough posts for the young men and women pouring out of the colleges. The situation for the moment was not unlike that of India.

For every young Turk wanted a professional or a business career, while the country needed cultivators.

Stamboul as we saw it was a city of dreams and regrets. The new growth, lusty and significant, was in Angora, the stalwart and somewhat grim capital of the young republic. In Anatolia, Kemal was forging the blade which to-day keeps peace on the Bridge of Asia. Stamboul, conscious of the future molten across the Bosphorus, was content to relax in the gentle warmth of the past.

One afternoon we went to the Sultan's summer palace. There were rooms full of celadon—basins, ewers and whole services of plates. If the collection were put on the market, there would be no value left in the treasures of Europe. In adjoining rooms, there were such stores of jewels that they ceased to be desirable. Next door to this repetitive magnificence were the women's quarters. As in old Hindu palaces, I was dismayed and discomfited. It is horrible to realize how the women of the East lived and died, in pens comparable to rabbit hutches. The seraglio of the Caliph—as of the Moroccan Sultans or the ancient Indian princes—included hundreds of concubines. The space at their disposal was less than the measurements of brood mares' boxes. From such antitheses of life, Atatürk saved his countrywomen. For this alone he should be blessed among apostles, political and social. He did much more, of course. For he broke the Treaty of Sèvres as if it had been cheap pottery. He saved Turkey from the fate of the Balkans and made her what she is to-day—a nation, united by creed, tongue and race.

For twenty years Turkey has been less afraid than any other people in the Middle East. The genius of Atatürk placed her in the position of having little to gain—or indeed to lose. For if Stamboul slipped from her grasp, she could be safe in Angora. The new republic was sufficiently secure to need neither a defensive nor an offensive policy. "Peace for a hundred years—that is what we require," said President İnönü, soldier and statesman. He was Ismet Pasha when I first met him in Angora. I remember him as an excellent bridge-player, quiet, thorough, reasoned, cautious of speech and action, exceedingly well informed. As he played his hand at Atatürk's all-night parties, so he rules the young republic of Turkey. Its existence became as much a barrier to Hitler's dreams of world dominion as the Allied armies in Russia and the Mediterranean.

Dodo Hanbury went back to Bulgaria with us, and the peasant Prime Minister, Mr. Liappchev, took us about the country on his special train. He was touring the farming centres, to encourage agriculture. We saw the blessing of a new village built where an earthquake had destroyed its predecessor. When the train drew into a wayside station, the whole countryside thronged to meet the Premier. Liappchev, good-tempered and unexcitable, stood on the steps of his coach and made a speech full of common sense. There were no politics



in it and no reference to 'wrongs' or 'rights'. He told the villagers to work hard, to depend on themselves, to find their own way out of difficulties, and above all to co-operate. "Don't try to do things alone. All of you work together and you will find it twice as easy." This was the burden of his speech. It was a model for Balkan conferences.

When we left the train, everyone tried to tell the P.M. about his own family affairs. Each father wanted to send his son to college—thus ensuring his future unemployment, for Bulgaria is an agricultural country with no room for a host of doctors, lawyers and bureaucrats. Every mother wanted to marry her daughter and asked Liappchev's advice. He gave it quite seriously. I was not sure whether what I saw was a reflection of Mosaic simplicity or a foretaste of the communal future inevitable with European federation.

## CHAPTER XXIII

1928

### *Macedonia and Yugo-Slavia*

WITH DODO and the Stancioff son, then in the Bulgarian Foreign Office, we drove into Macedonia. This troubled state, the incubator of Balkan unrest, existed only in the minds of its own people. For it was then divided between Bulgaria, Greece and Yugo-Slavia.

Before the present war the Macedonian Comitadji were as determined on independence—and with it the direst poverty—as Sinn Féin in Eire. In the mountains, they succeeded in producing an atmosphere of comic opera. They had their secret signs and meeting-places. They swore the most violent oaths upon a dagger and the flag of their non-existent country. Like the tragic—and impossible—republics of the Baltic, Lithuania, Esthonia and Latvia, Macedonia could not possibly support or defend itself. It had no hope of prosperity except within the framework of a bigger agricultural and commercial unit. But into such no Macedonian would willingly fit. To the confusion of the Balkans, the I.M.R.O. (Independent Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) wanted to add yet another language, still more frontiers as barriers to trade and human intercourse and another trifling variation of Christianity.

Apart from the mystery which every hamlet enjoyed, magnifying the dangers in which it was steeped by its own lawlessness, what I remember most is the smell of goat. There were moments when we forgot the melodramatic atmosphere of revolution and murder. But the smell of goat was always with us. At the first meal it became a permanent taste. The only signs of life in the country—which lent itself so well to the sudden flights and ambushes of its history—were

the flocks of enormous, brown goats so shaggy that they looked as if they were wearing plus-fours in fleec. The inhabitants must have been inured to goat, for they shared their huts with the animal and its triumphant smell. Shepherds wore goatskin cloaks. Often they carried a boiled kid's head, with the horns still attached, to eat while following their flocks.

Sveti-Vratch used to be the centre of Comitadji activity. It was a place of mystery to which the worst was always attributed. Therein, one expected rebels or patriots, their faces masked in cloaks, their rifles ready. In fact, the village was poor, peaceful and deserted. Under a Methuselah of a plane-tree, we drank coffee. The seller was a small boy, balancing a dozen handleless cups on a tin tray against which he banged a gigantic pair of sugar-tongs to advertise his wares. Buyers and cultivators of tobacco drifted ghostlike through the market-place. The dried leaves hung in festoons under every roof. There was an inn, almost as fragile as a Japanese paper house. It let beds, not rooms. We took a whole floor to obtain a little privacy. There were no closets of any kind. The surprised proprietor indicated the hillside—as if he offered a throne. Arthur went out into the main street and bargained for gaily painted buckets intended for children at the sea-side. As we were all sharing rooms, the use of these was restricted to a frail balcony. It shook at every movement, and the villagers gathered below to speculate upon our unusual behaviour. They were uncritical, but they offered earnest advice—also indicating the hillside.

Beyond Sveti-Vratch, I was disturbed by the habits of the small, wiry hillmen who seemed only able to speak in whispers. Six centuries of persecution—and far too little to eat—had reduced their size. Bristling with arms and unexpected hair, they stood about—as if waiting for disaster. In sombre groups, formless under their hearth-rug cloaks, they exchanged rumours. These were always alarming. Murders multiplied in the telling. They rarely happened in fact. When we asked the way, men looked over their shoulders from habit before murmuring the required information.

Greece began for me with the new villages in which refugees from Turkey in Asia had been settled. There had been a considerable exchange of populations arranged by Angora, Sofia and Athens. The result was still raw and unsettled.

Greece started the game by selecting a triangle, its apex at Saloniká, its base along the Bulgarian frontier, and emptying it of Bulgars. Seventy-five thousand were sent back to their own country and almost as many Greeks took their place. It seemed to me that everyone still looked surprised. They wore their new homes and conditions as if they were a fashion in clothes to which they were as yet unaccustomed.

Psychologically, I thought Bulgars—or Macedonians—and Greeks provided an interesting contrast. The former have an unlimited capacity for hard and uninteresting work. Their outlook is entirely

objective. The latter are traders not labourers. They are also theorists. They are brilliant and temperamental. The Macedonian, who likes to consider himself a Bulgarian—if he happens to be living in any other country—does not mind in the least how many of his lies are discovered. He enjoys prevarication. His upbringing has made him a plotter. Each people despises the other and is happy in a feeling of superiority. The Macedonian is fully conscious of Greek intelligence, but underestimates Greek courage. The Hellenic does the reverse with regard to his closest neighbours. Both races hate the Turk as a ruler, and find him satisfactory as a subject. Greece is a reality and Macedonia a chimera. Each has suffered and struggled with disastrous heroism. Logically they should be part of a Balkan federation which would secure them food in exchange for their tobacco and a settled continuity of living which no form of make-believe, revolutionary in theory, impractical in effect, has yet assured to South Eastern Europe.

Salonika seemed to me the raw ends of a dozen different ways of life. Every Mediterranean race was represented in the desolation of unfinished streets, crumbling walls and broken quays. Trade had withdrawn, following the redistribution of Balkan populations and the changing of frontiers. Everywhere there was a smell of rancid fat. Goats crowded the docks and held up the traffic in the streets. Flit was pervasive as an uneasy conscience. The beer was full of it. Rooms, trains, and cafés smelled of it. The corpses of flies and mosquitoes made melancholy the pillows. Flit, I am sure, was the chief culinary ingredient in every kitchen. When I complained to the nice, fat, gay waiter with bulging eyes, about the extraordinary taste of the coffee, he said, "The cook has perhaps used too much flit." Only the most persistent bugs could live. But like Macedonian Comitadjis, they were a hardy breed. They thrived on persecution.

Into Yugo-Slavia we went, and the country changed again. There were trees among the sand, and as soon as the road climbed into the hills every child tried to sell large red pomegranates on a string. There were roadside kitchens, with a few charcoal pans propped on convenient stones. Sausages and blobs of meat frizzled on a grid. A few pennies bought all sorts of doubtful delicacies roasted on sticks. There were 'boboliks', which are rings of crisp bread powdered with nuts, lurid-coloured drinks in flasks, and goats' cheese, whose proximity necessitated a gas-mask.

Monastir is the first town across the frontier, and it is a fragment of old Turkey on either side of a tree-lined canal. The embarrassing thing about the Balkans is the realistic way in which scenes from one country are staged in another. This particular piece of Macedonia was called Southern Serbia, in the hopes that a Bulgarianized Slav by some other name might prove more amenable. The majority of the Turkish landlords, who possessed immense estates worked by peasants on a system of *métayage*, had been expropriated.

Each erstwhile labourer owned in the vicinity of Monastir anything from three to thirty acres, and his old employer, in fez and immensely baggy trousers, lounged all day in front of a café, drowning his regret in excellent coffee. One might have been in ancient Stamboul, for the shops were of the open-fronted variety, with a grave Eastern merchant sitting cross-legged in each, amidst a wealth of colour—fruit, vegetables, striped rugs, scarlet handkerchiefs, and sheepskins dyed carmine or orange.

The people seemed to be divided into two categories. Those who had worked for years in America, or who had one or more relations there as a perpetual source of supply, were obviously well off. They had built new houses and they owned cheap motors. Their wives wore silk stockings on Sundays and used lip-salve. The others were exceedingly poor, for in this portion of Macedonia there is not enough arable land to support the population. In the mountains the houses were mud hovels, the gaping walls stuffed with straw, the thatched roofs falling to pieces. The peasants earned a bare existence as charcoal burners.

In the plains they were scarcely less ragged, possibly because in the Turkish days, to own a good suit or a fine horse was to attract the undesirable attention of the Bey.

The old villages were built of stones, with high, blind walls, and here the women wore the beautiful national dress. Their white robes were embroidered in delightful reds and purples and surmounted by long, black, sleeveless coats edged with fur. The Moslem women wrapped their heads in white veils above a garment like a discreet black dressing-gown, and they rarely worked in the fields.

We went into several houses, and found them very poor. Sometimes three families shared a dwelling.

One woman showed us her wedding-dress carefully preserved in the family chest, with layers of hand-knitted socks, waistcoats, embroidered sleeves, and other garments. It was so heavy—with embroidery, felt and fur—that I could scarcely lift it.

After the inspection we were given 'raki' in glasses the size of thimbles, and home-made Turkish delight. The father was dead—'somewhere in Bulgaria'. So he was probably a Comitadji. The son earned two shillings a day as a labourer. Last year's tobacco had been diseased. It had only fetched twenty-five dinars a kilo instead of three times that price, but the old woman assured us cheerfully that she was "Very, very, very well."

Even in Ochrida, where the vines are remarkably good, the people could not live without the help of some relation earning good wages abroad. This delicious town is built on the side of a hill crowned by a mediaeval castle, and it looks across a lake towards the Albanian frontier. Its old houses lean so confidentially towards each other across the cobbled streets that it seems as if the second stories must topple off altogether. The windows are all shuttered.

Up on the hill lived Bishop Nicolai, one of the wisest men in Serbia. He never talked politics. Gazing dreamily across the lake, blue as a jewel, to the Monastery of St. Naum, where both Christians and Moslems pray, he told us much about his beloved peasants. "The Macedonian has but two interests," he said. "His business and his religion. Leave him these and he is contented. Under the Yugo-Slavs he has more personal freedom than under the Turks, but, since the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the multiplicity of hostile frontiers has put an end to his business. Under the Turks he could wander from Ochrida to Stamboul or Baghdad without paying Customs or other dues. Before the last war the Macedonian shepherds wintered their flocks on the mild Salonikan plains. But all these new frontiers have put a stop to this and—as the mountain winters here are exceptionally severe—beasts have been sold at a loss." The Bishop sighed. "Politics are responsible for so much poverty," he concluded.

In Belgrade, we came back to civilization and saw the Serbs at their best. They are a delightful people and fantastic in their courage. As reward for heroism in the war of 1914-18, Versailles gave them a difficult task. For it was impractical to attempt the unification of Croat and Serb, with a fringe of recalcitrant Macedonians, in any familiar form of government.

A federation such as the U.S.A. in miniature might be the solution of Balkan problems. But it would need clear sight on the part of future peace-makers and the elimination of many shibboleths. For the terms, 'loyalty' and 'rebel' have no significance among peoples who were given an inflated sense of their own importance by President Wilson's 'self-determination' and then crushed into the composite design of countries which happened to be on the victorious side. This happened all over the Balkans, and the arrangement depended for success, not on the democratic principles it was supposed to represent, but on the personality of an individual king or president.

Alexander of Yugo-Slavia, Admiral Horthy, and President Mazaryk were capable of dealing with the difficulties insured by such archaic disturbance of natural laws and relations. But the re-establishment of thrones emphasized national ambitions. The system in Central Asia, where autonomous republics are federated within the cultural organization of the Soviet Union has proved much more successful.

I remember a discussion on this point between Stepan Raditch, the Croat patriot—who could be called a 'rebel'—and King Alexander. H.M. said, "Democracy should be allied to the principle of monarchy. They cannot logically be separated. For only a king is sufficiently disinterested to rule without prejudice, foreign or domestic."

I had some sympathy with Raditch's retort, "Then no king can rule two countries." Possibly the realization of this caused Alexander to turn himself into a Dictator.

Croats and Slavs would always, I think, be uneasy companions if

forced into the intimate relationships of one kingdom. They could more easily combine as equal partners in a larger and looser federation. For the races are fundamentally different. The Croats have a long heritage of culture weakened by the traditions which are their special pride. It was ludicrous of them to choose Serbia as a partner instead of Austria or Hungary, for they never ceased to feel themselves superior to the Slavs, dominant under King Alexander and Prince Paul. The Croats battle with words, finding the final expression of force in an extemporary murder—such as Raditch's in the parliament at Zagreb—or in the grim imagery of a secret society. The Serbs are a simple, violent peasant people without complexities, except a tendency to treat politics as sport. Alexander's dictatorship was wasted, in that it could not unite races as different as the Irish and the English.

The imagination of the Croats was caught by Hitler's New Order. In it they imagined themselves restored to privilege. The stalwart solid Serbs thought only of defending their own country.

One day Arthur and I motored out of Belgrade to spend the afternoon with Queen Marie. She was then living at Topola. The palace consisted of two villas set together in the middle of vineyards. In one of the small white houses, furnished at that time with wickerwork and English chintzes, lived King Alexander and Queen Marie, daughter of Marie of Roumania. In the other, surrounded by guards, with a sentry at every window, lived the boy who is now King Peter the Second, his brother and their governess. It seemed to me a terrible life for children, and I hoped they did not realize what the presence of so many soldiers portended. Prince Peter was playing with soldiers when his mother took us across a strip of new garden to see her sons. He asked her a lot of questions about machinery, for somebody had given him an engine which would not go. "My transport is held up," he said.

Our visit had begun with a mistake which, at the time, the Queen thought amusing.

"I am so very sorry we are late, Ma'am," I said, "but our driver imagined you were living up there on the hill." I pointed to a glaring and grandiose building with domes and coloured tiles.

"We probably shall be soon," said the Queen. "It's the Morgue."

Not long afterwards, King Alexander's bullet-riddled body, brought back from Marseilles, lay in state in the newly completed mausoleum.

Our hostess was quite as outspoken as her impetuous mother, to whom Roumania's Prime Minister Titulesco paid a tribute of understanding when he said to me, "Après tout—c'est elle la royauté!" I thanked her for having received us at Topola and she retorted with a half smile, "Well, my mother told me I must."

Impulsively, she added, "I shall never be as good a Queen. You see, I really don't like clothes." Marie of Yugo-Slavia was wearing grey flannel and a solid hair-net. Her face was unpowdered. She looked

healthy and vital. "I am glad you came—now," she said, "you must have tea. English people always want tea, don't they?" But she would not eat anything herself.

Sitting behind a simple china tea-pot, instead of the silver birds—partridges, I think—out of which her mother used to dispense tea when she remembered, Queen Marie talked about her husband. She evidently admired him very much. "He works so hard," she said, "and they bother him so much. He hardly has a moment these days—and they're always trying to shoot him. He doesn't mind, but sometimes it does interrupt his work."

The Queen spoke as if assassination were influenza. She was quite as brave as her husband, and she had a sensible gaiety which went well with her appearance. For she was not at all beautiful, but her smile was like her conversation. I thought it would be very pleasant to live with her. She said, "I really don't know much about politics. I have the children to look after and the houses and the vines. You'd better come and see them."

We walked along an unfinished terrace and down the hill-side. The neat, pruned trees were an ordered tide upon the brown of the earth. The Queen was telling us how her husband was used to arguing with his fellow-farmers at the Vinicultors' annual dinner, when there was a violent explosion and a portion of the hill-side blew up within a few yards of our feet. I do not know what I did. I think I was too frightened to do anything. Even my husband dropped his cigarette. From the house came an officer, running at full speed. Soldiers with rifles in their hands appeared suddenly in the garden. Only the Queen remained unmoved. She completed the sentence she had begun. Then she said, with cheerful interest, "I wonder if they are dynamiting for my new vineyard—or it might be a bomb. I'll ask."

A panting A.D.C. brought apologies and unnecessary reassurance. The charge of dynamite had been bigger than was intended. "Well, I don't see how we're going to get the vines planted now," said the Queen, peering into the chasm. "It's too steep."

The last sight we had of her was running down the steps of the villa after we had said good-bye. "Wait! Wait!" she called to us, for we were already in the car. "It's late and you'll be cold driving back to Belgrade. Look, I've brought you a coat." She held it out to my husband and then ran on across the garden to the closely-guarded house where her boys played with soldiers.

"My mother brought us up very well," she had said to us while she watched us having tea. "We were never allowed to make a fuss."

This absence of 'fuss' characterized every action of Alexander and his wife. They played bridge together without any of the usual marital arguments. They travelled in the simplest fashion they could contrive. They were always guarded, but they managed to give the impression that they did not notice it. Without 'fuss' Alexander

proposed to establish Balkan stability based on a revision of the Treaty of Versailles. That was possible as well as sensible. But, also without 'fuss', he hoped to unite Macedonians, Croats and Serbs. For this purpose he changed his appearance and his character. "I want to be the first typical Yugo-Slavian," he said. It would have been a good type, for Alexander hid nothing and feared nothing. He was honest, hard, opinionated and direct. One joke I heard him make. "My enemies are always shooting at me and I can't retaliate. So I force them to listen while I talk. That is my only privilege!"

Without 'fuss'—indeed with a very faint smile as if he were a little amused and also a little contemptuous—King Alexander died as he saluted the crowds in Marseilles. For a little while his country was united.

## CHAPTER XXIV

1928

### *From Albania to Germany*

ALBANIA PRESENTED us with several headaches, mental and physical. We arrived by way of roads which did not exist and rivers that were always overflowing. It was my first visit to the delectable and quite illogical land which has no pretensions to being a nation. Greece wanted the south, where Christians predominated. The northern hills were ruled by a chieftain, Marco Joni of the Merdite tribe, who could have been independent whenever he chose. King Zog, an intelligent young Moslem headman, struggled bravely to foster national sentiment from the palace in which he imprisoned himself at Tirana.

Of all the impossible 'separatisms' which we had watched piling up barriers of language, habit, expediency, finance, passport regulations and tariffs all over the Balkans, Albania seemed to me the culmination. Italy had no right to seize the kingdom—except that of a creditor foreclosing on an unsatisfactory mortgage—but like Abyssinia, Albania could not possibly rule or defend or feed herself. She could not even make a satisfactory road for the inevitable mechanized transport of modernity.

Of all the political marriages into which the Balkans were forced or persuaded after the last war, that between Marco Joni's Christian hill-men and Zog's Moslem townfolk was the most surprising. Modern writers insist that marriage should be based on a community of interest and purpose rather than on sentiment. This surely applies to the union of races as well as of individuals. It was ignored at Versailles, Trianon and Sévres. It is habitually acknowledged in Moscow. Rumour has it that a Soviet statesman recently informed an Allied Foreign Minister



that he need not concern himself with the behaviour of Germany after her defeat. "Communist Russia will see that Prussia and Saxony make no further trouble," said the Slav. "What about the rest—the Rhineland, Würtemberg and Bavaria?" According to rumour, prophetic I am sure, the answer was, "Communist France will look after the west."

The strength of the Soviet Union is perfectly expressed in this tale. For Moscow acknowledges the fundamental principle of federation. So does Washington. We contributed to the inevitable destruction of Europe foretold by President Clemenceau and by Field-Marshal Smuts twenty-five years ago. For we believed in the outworn policy of 'Divide and Rule'. How can this be successful unless one Power plays dictator?

In Albania, Arthur and I saw the result of division. The country—a fragment of the old Austrian Empire—was poor and contentious. A handful of British police, under Sir Jocelyn Percy, achieved miracles by means of individual prestige. Colonel Stirling, as adviser to King Zog, was almost sufficient to keep the Government on a reasonably straight path. But Italy contributed a twist whenever possible, and she controlled the money-bags. Everything was subsidized by Rome. It was only a matter of time until the Duce demanded what he had already bought.

In Tirana, Arthur and I made friends with the Stirlings. They are a remarkable couple. 'Michael' has as much knowledge of the Middle East between the Adriatic and the Persian Gulf as it is possible for a Western brain to hold. He is popular with an inordinate number of people with different aims and ideas. He is not at all imposing in appearance. He is shy. His achievements are considerable, but they do not make him self-satisfied. He is a most delightful writer and talker, invaluable as a mirror for what is really happening outside conventional official dimensions. He is incapable of distorting fact, but in his own opinion he shrinks to proportions altogether out of keeping with what he has done.

Marygold Stirling is excessively capable. She has a lovely face. It is unfair that she should have so many talents and make good use of them all. She has never been known to refuse anybody anything. So it is difficult for her to keep any possessions—except the hearts of her friends. Of these she is always assured.

In Tirana, Arthur and I met King Zog. On the morning we intended to leave, by car for Germany, the young man invited us to the palace. An A.D.C. with correct golden aiglettes came to fetch us, and I remember that while he leaned out of the car window to direct the driver, these caught on the outside handle, and it was so difficult to disentangle him that I had visions of arriving at the palace with a splendid young officer hanging upon the door. This incident naturally made the unfortunate A.D.C. even more nervous than he had been

on his arrival, when he found us in travelling tweeds unsuited, he insisted, to an audience. "You will remember, won't you, to walk backwards and to bow three times," he urged upon my husband.

"No," retorted that invariably effective and imperturbable man, accustomed to levées at St. James's.

Zog received us in an admirably plain and workmanlike study. If I remember rightly, there was nothing superfluous in the way of pictures or furniture. The King was a tall, slight, graceful and therefore rather pathetic figure. For, ruling a wild, courageous, indeterminate people, weakened by a thousand personal dissensions, he gave no impression of force. In excellent German he talked wisely and intelligently of Albania, but without, I thought, much vision. No doubt, he enjoyed being king. The position certainly brought him a good deal of wealth. It enabled him—later—to marry a charming and beautiful woman. He began as a protégé of Yugo-Slavia in opposition to Fan Noli—a liberal and a priest—whose rule was upset by Zog's second attempt at revolution. Then he turned his coat for the benefit of Italy. For he believed that a brilliant Western ally, with the culture and the wealth of Rome, could do more for Albania than the new and not altogether comfortable alliance of Croats and Slovenes on his eastern frontier. But when Zog accepted every form of assistance from Italy, including subsidies and technical experts, he must have known that he could only be a puppet. It was the easy way—the lavish way—he chose for both himself and his country.

Before that first meeting, during which the new King discussed with my husband Sir Jocelyn's admirable police, who kept peace by force of common sense and pluck, and who—when invasion came—were ready to fight with rifles instead of words, I had heard the usual tales pertaining to a Balkan personality. Zog was credited with being a mighty warrior. Had not seven horses been killed under him when he led his own tribesmen against Montenegro? As a lover he had suffered even more dramatically. For legend ran that the girl he courted had been shot by her own obstinate father and her body sent to Zog, with the result that the whole family were exterminated as soon as the rejected suitor came to the throne.

King Zog had dignity and charming manners. We both liked him. He must also have had a sense of humour. For he smiled at us in conspiratorial fashion when the A.D.C., following his own precepts, bowed for the third time within reach of the door, stepped briskly backwards, caught his heel in an enormous spittoon and heavily sat down in it.

At that time King Zog was the object of so many blood feuds that he felt it would be dangerous to leave the palace. Albania, having been given a king, must keep him. I dare say he was right, but invisibility—so far as the populace was concerned—limited his appeal. So his authority suffered. It was the exact reverse of the system established

by King Alexander and King Boris. Their popularity and prestige were based on the way they constantly risked assassination to maintain the common touch.

From Tirana we went to Berlin. In Germany, we saw something of the Weimar Republic's last struggles to preserve the country from Nazism. We stayed on the outskirts of the capital with Allen Graves, an attaché at our Embassy. He married one of the prettiest girls I have seen. She is small and dark, the daughter of Count zu Döhma, a great friend of the Kaiser's. Her uncle was the banker, Friedrich Horstman, who got into trouble with the Nazis. He may have had some Jewish blood. He collected beauty in his great house in the Tiergarten. He enjoyed people and old porcelain and ideas. I remember his dinner-parties, with Ursula Hohenlohe looking like a dark swan and the Swedish Countess Plauen as good-looking, but very fair. In later years the little Dorothé von Bülow, granddaughter of the great Chancellor, was there. Her husband, Carlos Pückler, became a newspaper reporter in England and wrote about us in a fashion which greatly annoyed Dr. Goebbels. Always, at Freddy Horstman's parties, there were swans on the table. Old Dresden china they were, with the loveliest wings. They reminded me of hills in winter when the wind ruffles the snow slopes into pinions. Over the swans, touching them sometimes as if she loved them, brooded the brilliant half-Jewish Frau Horstman. The whole household disappeared at the height of the Nazi terror. But in 1928, the swans sailed smoothly upon a lace cloth, and Countess zu Döhma asked if we could not find English wives for her sons, so that, if need be, they would have homes outside Germany. "Why?" I asked. She replied, "Something will happen in Germany, if you remain tied to the cart-wheels of France. Brüning and Stresemann are doing their best, but with nothing! Germany is too poor and too unhappy to be a safe neighbour. It is ten years since the war ended and France makes no pretence of disarming, or of a reasonable relationship with us."

The conversation became general. Freddy Horstman said, in effect, "Germany is still the strongest potential force in Central Europe. That you cannot change, because of the nature of the people. Give them a chance and they will always work. Their strength in war is that they treat it as a business. France is terrified of us, because of her own weakness. She knows she would break under any strain. But if you continue to disregard the moderate socialist Germany of to-day, you will force us to one extreme or another. Unless you help us to a reasonable prosperity, with which we can regain our self-respect, we shall fall to National Socialism or to Communism. That is the choice for German youth." Somebody reminded us, "Saxony is like English roast beef—brown outside and red underneath."

"Germany is growing accustomed to violence," said Count Plauen, a middle-aged landowner, international in his outlook. "That is the

danger. It is not safe to walk in the smaller streets at night, and it is worse on the docks at Hamburg and Bremen. Gangs of unemployed beat up anybody they think has money. They call themselves Communists, but hunger is the driving force. If we cannot feed the people and give them some sort of future, there will be disaster. And it will not be in Germany alone."

Back in England, I repeated this conversation to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, who used sometimes to lunch with us. He amazed me by agreeing with our old-fashioned German friends. "They are quite right," he said. "No nation can stand being as miserable as Germany has been since the war. But we can do nothing. France won't hear of a reasonable policy. Twice she has been invaded, and it's no use hoping she will get over her fears." Reflectively, he added, "Or her greed. She made a good thing out of reparations. She got new factories and new machinery and she won't risk her industrial lead by giving Germany a chance."

One night I dined at the House of Commons with David Allen, a Northern Irishman who made a habit of marrying dark-haired enchantresses—first Lady Phyllis King and then the Marquise de Casa Maury. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and E. P. Wise, for whom at that time a considerable political future was predicted, made up the party. To my amazement, they all knew what was happening in Central Europe. Mr. Wise was sure that the German High Command had begun to plan another war as soon as the last ended with what they considered a temporary setback. "We should have marched into Berlin," said the Socialist M.P. "Then there would have been no question about the German Army being defeated. We should have raised the blockade at once and fed the people. Then there would have been no bitterness. In that unnecessary year of starvation which we imposed on Germany after the armistice, we lost more than we had done in four years of war." He continued, "We should never have allowed France to put her black troops into the Rhineland and we should have controlled inflation. If we had stabilized German and Austrian currencies with our own, there could have been no Jewish gambling with exchange. That ruined the people in Germany who could and would have helped us. The thrifty lost their savings. There was no money left among the small people to educate their children."

So it went on. With amazement I listened. It seemed to me that many people knew exactly what was going to happen in Europe, but nobody troubled to stop it. The Ministers I met were more concerned with the slump which gathered force early in 1929 than with the dissolution of a moderate and friendly Germany which would leave a High Command bent on revenge to play ball either with Communism or National Socialism. German generals preferred the latter, and big business in the Rhineland supported them.

Our recent journeying in Central Europe had stirred me to an in-

tensity of interest I had previously felt only in Arabia. So, ahead of the projected 'anschluss' which might have saved us all, I talked about 'federation'. Astounded, I listened to men who knew far more than I did, hoping that 'somehow things would work out'. Socialists and Conservatives were equally opposed to 'revision'. Change seemed to them the worst of all ills. So Britain hung on to the skirts of France until, in 1940, they tore in her hands. Thus Germany was precipitated—from fear of Communism or from the realization that she could hope for nothing except by force—into the stranglehold of National Socialism.

During those years, with the exception of Lord Monsell and Sir Samuel Hoare, the British statesmen I met went on hoping that a makeshift would turn into a miracle. Reason and common sense were sacrificed to the preservation of the *status quo*. It became a fetish. Ambassadors and Foreign Ministers knew the impossibility of making bricks out of the straw provided by Versailles, but they succumbed to the spirit of a synthetic age. "Surely it will last our time" was the funeral march of the 1920-30's.

## CHAPTER XXV

1929

### *King Alexander of Yugo-Slavia and Benito Mussolini*

ARTHUR WENT TO AMERICA in the spring of 1929. He stayed with my brother who was then at our Embassy in Washington. He wrote to me that for the first time in his life, reading the American press, he felt himself among foreigners. To an isolationist Senator he spoke of 'parish pump politics'. Earnestly the Middle Westerner replied, "Colonel, I don't think you realize how progressive we are. There hasn't been an outside pump over here for so long I can hardly remember."

From Aitkin, centre of polo-playing, where he spent a happy fortnight with the Allen Forbes, he wrote that old Mrs. Hitchcock, indomitable in the saddle, the matriarch of the place, wanted her grandsons to learn polo at school. To ensure this, she bought the requisite amount of land and presented it to the startled headmaster with enough ponies to mount two teams. It was all very surprising—in contrast to Europe. For America was developing short sight, by always looking inward. England was squinting horribly to avoid seeing too much. France was blind to her own decay. The rest of Europe was looking so far ahead that it missed the present altogether.

While Arthur was in the U.S.A., enjoying himself very much between the extremes of Washington, South Carolina, Boston and the

New York belonging to the musical Rosens or to Dr. Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, I went back to Albania.

A new colour process in photography had been invented by a man called Blattner. Michael Powell, now a celebrated producer, and I were to test it by making a film in the mountains north of Tirana. The clarity of the atmosphere and the brilliant peasant costumes were particularly suitable for the experiment.

In the Albanian capital we enlisted the help of the Stirlings, and somehow we acquired the services of Stroud Read from the British Museum. I forget why he wanted to accompany us, for he had been wounded in the last war and could only ride sideways—which, in the ranges heaped against the Yugo-Slavian frontier, meant intense discomfort. Sometimes the paths were no wider than the strap of a wrist-watch could span. Stroud's feet then dangled over the edge of the erudite world he ornamented. Eternity or dissolution—according to the point of view—was in the ravine below.

'Michael' Stirling came with us, upon an amorous stallion. I rode a mare. The whole journey was made hideous—and dangerous—by the affair between these two. 'Michael' had promised not to come within one mile of me, while we climbed the narrow spirals slung between precipices. But all the way, hanging on to the edges of mountains and slithering into ravines among a chaos of loose stones, I was pursued by the screams of the stallion. Michael's wrists nearly gave way, and my mare, nervous as a cat, danced with frenzy upon the narrowest places. At any moment, trying to whip round, she might have gone over the edge.

The nights were rent by the love-making of the exasperated—and still separated—animals. I was thankful when, in particularly vivid moonlight, they broke loose. Satisfied with each other, they subsequently behaved with circumspection. Michael and I could shout companionably over the backs of the pack-ponies without being precipitated into a passionate struggle.

Except in the company of St. John Philby, I had been accustomed to consider myself 'tough'. I could walk or ride all day. Food mattered little to me and a saddle sufficed me for pillow. But I like breakfast before any effort is required of me. Michael Powell, the most amusing companion, completely detached from reality as I knew it, disliked the early mornings so much that he could face nothing but black coffee. 'Michael Stirling' was impervious to human needs. Stroud was beset by difficulties which on such arid journeys were much more likely to be 'worse than death' than the suspected—and improbable—habits of natives. In the dawn we watched him disappear up a thicketed slope. Anxiously we waited. If he descended in silence, it would be with a blinding headache. The day would be oppressed by his pain. If he sauntered down, humming, "Unto us a child is

<sup>1</sup> Colonel W. Stirling.

given, Unto us a son is born," we knew that all was well. The variety of our nightly offerings had been justified. The day would bloom with intellect and information.

There remained the question of my breakfast. Hardly I would rise from—or more exactly roll out of—a camp-bed pitched on a preposterous slope. I would wave away the pack animals or cows which had been snuffling in my hair. I would empty my riding-boots of tortoises or scorpions. Then I would demand a proper breakfast, while three men, varyingly haggard, would strive to hide their exasperation. I do not think I ever got more than a hunk of bread with rancid goat butter, and I am sure I had to eat it in the saddle. Consequently, I was very tired at night when we reached some friendly house and were expected to talk for two or three hours while a meal was being prepared.

Generally, the Albanian tribesmen were involved in a blood feud. As soon as we arrived, the man with the loudest voice would go out on to the mountain-side and bellow across the valley, "We have strangers by our hearth. There must be no shooting to-night." According to custom, a twenty-four-hour truce was then allowed. This gave the guests time to ride out of danger before the following sunset.

A blood feud may go on for ever—or until every male in the two families has been killed. It is a case of murder gone mad. For no tribesman gives his enemy a chance. He ambushes and shoots in the back if possible, and is himself assassinated with no more hope than a sitting rabbit. A boy scarce grown may be called upon to pay the blood debt. Its cause may have been forgotten, for feuds are inherited from one generation to another. Women are only involved in them if they are virgins living and fighting as men. This is the most extraordinary custom of mountain Albania. If a girl refuses to marry the bridegroom chosen by her parents, to whom she may have been betrothed before birth, she must shear her head and turn herself as far as possible into a male. Sexless as an anchorite, she is expected to take part in tribal wars. Masculine labour is demanded of her. In a blood feud, she takes the same part as her brothers, but if she has a lover, it is the man whom she ought to have married who must avenge her chastity. We had one such girl with our caravan. She was an excellent shot. For weeks I thought she was a man.

Marco Joni, the great Christian chieftain of the north, who could treat on equal terms with the new King in Tirana, was a friend of 'Michael' Stirling's. He received us hospitably in the middle of the high pastures whereon—in summer—the tribesmen kept their flocks. We ate a lot of mutton and drank raki made from plums or cherries. We chose locations and wrote the script, based on a local story. We selected natural actors among riflemen and shepherds. Everything was arranged, when a telegram, carried up from Tirana, informed us that the company in London had changed their minds.

Twenty-one and very grown-up



Bertram I

CLOTHES MAKE THE  
WOMAN

Feather bouquet, at Court





1. In the Ypres Salient, end of 1914  
2. Being forborne—to the Press—in  
South America, 1932. 3. As Military  
Assistant to Gen. Sir Bernard Paget,  
C. In C., Home Forces; at G.H.Q. 1934

ARTHUR

Dispirited, we returned to the capital. The only bright touch was the behaviour of Marco Joni. He accompanied us because, in the presence of a woman, he could not be shot. This he explained to me with care, adding, "You must not wear breeches or from a distance my enemies may take you for a man. You must put on many skirts." He looked with distaste at my head. "Your hair is not long enough—indeed you look very like a boy."

I did my best for him next day, but refused to appear more feminine by balancing sideways on a man's saddle. So we proceeded very slowly, with scouts thrown out on the hills and parties of riflemen half a mile ahead and an equal distance behind us.

Nothing happened. We arrived safely in the plains, and with a French cameraman, I went south to the grey huddled village of Argiro-castro, which is largely Greek. One moonlit night, I stood on a roof and looked across the bare hills of Epirus. I could not resist them. Next day I crossed the frontier and after some wandering, found myself in Monastir. Politically this was Serbia, geographically it was Macedonia. Culturally it was Turkish, and if the town had a spirit it was probably Greek. The Governor invited me to dinner, and the officer who brought the invitation told me, "You are fortunate. You will meet the King."

A month or two earlier Pavlevitch, the Croat leader—patriot or revolutionary according to the point of view, but the terms are synonymous east of the Adriatic—had been tried and executed in Belgrade. His secret society had sworn to revenge him. On their national flag, held in place by a revolver, a knife, and a cross, the youth of Catholic Croatia, with a heritage of civilization older than the Hapsburg empire, swore to fight to the death 'for the liberation of our people reduced to slavery'. Simultaneously, the Macedonian Revolutionary Committee were terrorizing the south. King Alexander must have known this, yet—at the height of the Macedonian excesses—he lingered at Monastir.

At dinner in the simple, sparsely furnished house, where Alexander had had a big and shabby desk placed in front of a window because he liked space and light when he started to work in the early hours before breakfast, he said, "It is impossible to bother about death. That is a matter which concerns no one till the moment it happens."

I remember the Governor looked concerned. For Alexander ruled some thirteen and a half million forcible and decided Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Slavones, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Bosnians and Dalmatians, with a few Turks and Armenians. Among them were several different religions accustomed to hostility, and as many languages, each with a national significance.

I remember Alexander as a tired, thin-lipped man with grey hair and heavy, rather straight, dark eyebrows. His face was full of character. He could be hard, but in an intelligent manner. He cared nothing about his own life or his appearance. His uniform looked as

if it had seen much service. His handkerchief was darned. The high forehead of a student contrasted with the deep lines scarred between nose and mouth. He talked, as a soldier, about the Macedonians who, with bombs and rifles, were demanding what amounted to autonomy within their mythical borders. They had certain honest grievances, for Yugo-Slavia at that time was trying to make good Serbian citizens out of villagers who wanted to talk their own language, have their own churches and schools, raise and spend their own taxes, and spell their names with 'ov' instead of 'itch'.

"In a new country, the only thing which matters is unity," said the King. "Force is not always the best weapon, but there are occasions when it must be used. Nationalism to-day is as dangerous as dynamite. The Balkans suffer from excessive individualism. In Yugo-Slavia we have all the ingredients for a first-class explosion. It is my business to prevent it."

Before dinner we had drunk the excellent *slivovitch* made in the country, but the King did not finish his glass. He put it down to light a cigarette and after that he seemed to me to smoke all the time. When the meal came to an end we sat in solid wooden chairs and drank a great deal of coffee. The King's cup was refilled as soon as it was empty. The Governor talked of the Macedonian Comitadjis who came down from their mountains to get food and ammunition from sympathizers in the neighbourhood of Monastir. "There is a café here which they use as a meeting-place," he said.

"Let us go to it," said the King. "I should like some more coffee."

I have never seen a man look more surprised than the Governor. His face became a sheet of blank paper. In Serbian he protested. For a few minutes the room was full of protest. Subdued by respect and hampered by amazement, it beat against the imperturbable King. Then we were all on our feet and shortly afterwards in two cars driving through the Moslem part of the town. In the daytime I had seen turbaned figures in the long robes of Ali Baba seated beside their open-fronted shops which—after the fashion of the East—could be shut up at night like cupboards flat in a wall. But the streets were comparatively empty after sunset, and the Governor, who sat facing the King with a dismayed and speechless officer, explained, "There has been so much trouble. The police do not encourage anyone to go about late unless he has important business."

There were a number of men gathered round the café entrance. Their talk ceased as we arrived. They drew back and stared. Then they bunched together round the door. Into the café walked the King followed by silence and consternation. He sat down at the first empty table. It happened to be near a wall, but Alexander pushed his chair to one side so that he provided an easy target. The room was nearly full, and few of the dark, shaggy men drinking a colourless spirit looked to me like townsfolk. The lights were inadequate, and at first

the waiters were so surprised that there seemed to be a cessation of all movement. Then several men got up and went out.

"My father<sup>1</sup> used often to sit in the cafés with his friends. He liked to feel in touch with the people." The King spoke in his ordinary voice. When he was tired or overworked, it sounded abrupt. "My neighbour, Boris,<sup>2</sup> talks with everyone he meets in the street. I should think he has exchanged ideas with most of his subjects at some time or another. It may be a good thing. But I really haven't time and it adds to the work of the police. They have enough to do here already."

Coffee was brought by a man whom I imagined to be the proprietor. He disappeared as soon as he had served it. The King lit one cigarette after another. "I don't see your Comitadjis," he told the Governor.

"I hope not, Your Majesty," said that unfortunate man, his head turning as if it were a corkscrew as he tried to look in all directions at once.

"I doubt if they would shoot me here," said the King, as if he were considering a mathematical problem. He talked seriously and simply, his clean-shaven face in sharp contrast to the thickets of hair at the other tables. He said, "Royalty is much like any other Trades Union. It has its rules. I suppose kings are more important to themselves than to anyone else. No doubt we over-rate our importance. For kings, of course, are interested in other kings. When one disappears, the Union is weakened. Our work carries an enormous amount of perquisites, but we are penalized like other superior craftsmen by the fact that we must always behave as we are expected to do. We can't go on strike. We must, if necessary, provide revolution with the necessary corpses. In life we are certainly cherished above our merits, but we never know when we may be expected to die."

Shivers ran down my spine. From where I sat, I could see little but a long counter at the end of the room. There was suppressed movement. I imagined the shabby, lean men sweating while they watched and waited. "To my mind," said Alexander, "there is no third course open to us. A king must be either on a throne or in a coffin—a successful shot separates the two."

I remembered how the Kings of Serbia had died. 'Black George', the Haiduk or bandit chief from which the Karageorgeovitch dynasty is descended, liberated his country from the Turks in 1810. He is said to have killed his father and brother and he was himself assassinated. The Obrenovitch rulers, another Alexander and his wife Draga, a shop-keeper's daughter, were murdered in their bedroom by a group of officers belonging to the Black Hand.

"There is only one thing a king cannot do, and that is run away," said the man who arrogated to himself the dictatorship of Yugo-Slavia. It was said without ostentation, for Alexander had no poses of any

<sup>1</sup> King Peter of Serbia.

<sup>2</sup> King Boris of Bulgaria.

kind. He was primarily a soldier, and as such the equal of anyone in Europe.

Serbia saw him as a young Napoleon when he defeated the Turks in 1913 and subsequently drove the Bulgars in confusion across the frontier which they ought never to have crossed. The Austrian invasion of 1914 found him at the head of men who are born fighters. He had no nerves. He never moved by a hair's breadth to escape a bullet. He never joked, because his race does not laugh in the face of death. They accept it with dignity when they have fought to the last bullet. Alexander, I think, was always quite friendly with death. They had a mutual respect for each other.

After their first soberly carried-out retreat, the Serbs turned and swept the Austrians off the face of their country. In a ramshackle old car at the head of a fighting army went old King Peter, standing up on occasions and leaning over the torn hood to shout "Faster! Faster!" In the first rank was Alexander, young, grave, determined.

With soldiers he was at his best, for his was a disciplined nature. He appreciated order, force and courage. His father used to say, "We are peasants. All my ancestors were peasants. I am prouder of that than of being king, but I don't need a parliament to tell me how to rule, any more than my grandfather needed a herdsman to tell him how to look after his cows. A parliament is for company and Ministers for decoration."

His second son Alexander—Regent for some years before he became king and never crowned because he did not like ceremonies—was probably prouder of being a soldier than of the throne which he treated as a desk. Because he was a soldier, making a fetish of unity and discipline, he could not compromise with the loose fabrication of violent and dissident interests which had suddenly decided—or been induced—to call itself Yugo-Slavia. In the café at Monastir where, at any moment, a bullet might have put an end to his vision of a solid Balkan block united against the ambitions of Italy, he said, "Kings must be the first Internationalists." I found sufficient spirit, in spite of the fog of gloom in which we sat, to protest. "The Balkans are all too fiercely concerned with their own personal affairs to think on an international basis." And I told him how I had seen the most intelligent woman in Europe happily cutting out the eyes of a newspaper photograph. It represented the Prime Minister of a neighbouring country enriched by Versailles at the expense of her own.

"All these national enmities are childish," said Alexander, sighing. "They belong to the days of savagery. We *must* get away from them. If I live long enough, I may—with the help of Boris, who is far more popular than I am—make some sort of unity in the Balkans. I dare say if I am killed, he and my cousin Paul may have more chance of success—but Paul wants to die in his bed. That is unnatural in the Balkans and it may hamper him. Eventually Germany may provide

the cement we need, for if she is ever able to make another war, we here must not waste time in fighting against each other."

As we left the café—amidst complete silence—the King stood aside for me to go out of the door first. I wondered if that would be his last moment. Alexander must have noticed my expression. "It is waste of time to be afraid," he said.

On my way back through Albania I saw a good deal of the Italian Minister whose name I have forgotten. He must have written to Mussolini about me, for as soon as I arrived in Rome, I was summoned to the Palazzo Venezia. The Duce was sitting behind a large desk under an enormous portrait of himself. I crossed what seemed to me an unnecessary extent of polished wood, while the Fascist leader remained seated. I thought he was not going to get up to meet me, so I stopped a little way from him and held out my hand. There was a pause before the Duce's set expression, which he assumed when he wished to be impressive, relaxed. Then—squares and more solid than I remembered him—he came round the desk, still staring in lidless fashion. With a mixture of energy and indifference, he kissed my hand. "So you are not frightened of me," he said.

"No. Why should I be?"

"Most people are."

In those days, I think, Mussolini was mildly amused by the impression he took pains to create. He said, "Well, was I right—did somebody make love to you at Bengazi?"

"No," I retorted. "You weren't right about anything. I got to Kufra."

"I know you did. That journey of yours will be useful to us—when I send an army in your steps."

"You won't get it over the dunes," I said. I was wrong. In 1931, ten years after I slipped into the Senussi capital with a caravan of blacks and Arabs exhausted by thirst, an Italian mechanized force with planes and tanks fought their way into the sacred and hitherto secret valley.

"I shall get it"—as you say—anywhere I choose. That is what an army is for."

I wanted to talk about Albania.

"It is not a country at all," said the Duce. "It is not even a possibility. Italian money may hold it together——"

"Or break it to pieces," I interrupted.

The Duce asked many questions, all of them shrewd. "What did you think of Zog?" he concluded.

"Charming, but not solid," I suggested.

Mussolini retorted, "He is clever enough, but not hero, and he loves intrigue." He added, "If there is another war, Italy will have to defend Albania. There is no one else."

Then we talked—as we had done in Milan nine years ago—of what

we wanted to do. "Are you still anxious to live dangerously?" asked the Duce.

"Do you still want to live alone?" I retorted.

Mussolini laughed. I think, in essentials, he has always been alone. This was at first his strength. It became his weakness, for he would neither listen to other people's reason, nor believe anything he had not himself seen.

I asked him if he were content with what he had done.

"No," he replied. "If I were content, I should be dead."

We talked of North Africa. The Duce asked me, "What did you think of our colonization?"

I said, "When I was in Tripoli, it hardly existed except in the coastal towns." I told him how the officers I had met bemoaned their exile. At first they used to say, "See, there is a camel—how picturesque! And there is a palm tree—very attractive! But how little life there is and how little movement!" When sirocco began to blow or the 'fifty-day wind', they groaned, "It is not human. How can one make oneself a life?"

"Go back," ordered Mussolini, "and see how it is changed."

He was right. General Balbo's Tripolitania was in the first rank of colonial achievements.

It was in his autobiography, I think, that Mussolini wrote, "I shall make my own life a masterpiece." This he could not do. For he was never satisfied. No success was for him complete. How could it be, for he was hampered by his personal interpretation of the Roman ideal. When he wrote, "I am desperately Italian," he should have substituted the word 'Roman'. For, fifteen years ago, when he talked to me of North Africa, he saw it as the granary of Caesar's empire, the training-ground of Legions. He protested, "So much Italian industry has been wasted for the benefit of France in Tunisia. It is ridiculous. I need every Italian working to the utmost for his own country. I need more and more Italians."

Laughing, I said, "That is even more than Caesar demanded."

"But it is not difficult," retorted the Duce. "Have you been south of Naples? What is the chief product of the towns and villages there—children, of course. I shall increase that sort of production by subsidizing it. Thus I shall get as many Italians as I need."

"What are you going to do with them?"

"Colonize," he said.

I told the Duce how pleasant it had been to leave the savagery of Northern Abyssinia—where the complete lack of any form of government or civil organization was an irritant as well as a danger—for Eritrea, which, even in 1919, was well-run and peaceful, although not yet developed on modern lines. He said, "It is absurd, of course, this cutting up of Africa into artificial slices. Eritrea and Abyssinia have been the same regional proposition for a thousand years. One

depends on the other. There are no frontiers, human or geographical. The Romans were the best colonists in the world. The Dutch are probably the next best. The French only colonize for the sake of manpower and you British for raw material. When I begin, it will be in the spirit of creation."

"Re-creation," I interpolated, and quoted, "Civis Romanus sum."

The Duce laughed. "Because I was wrong about your getting to Kufra, shall I give you something?" he asked.

"What?"

Mussolini looked a trifle surprised. "I thought you might like a photograph."

"I haven't even got one of my husband."

"Do you love him?"

"Yes."

"Good. Women are always much more agreeable when they are in love."

So I was reminded of our meeting in Milan, when we had talked in the same strain. But the man had changed out of all measure. He could not keep away from the subject of colonization. He wanted an empire, but he was never in doubt as to the quality of the human material at his disposal. He understood France too. The only country about which he was not so much misinformed as stubbornly determined to be ignorant was Britain. He knew France was finished. He thought we were too. Of course he was conceited and as he grew older, he became something of a megalomaniac. Where Hitler—half crazed by mysticism and soothsayers—believed himself the servant of Germany, the Duce was convinced he was master of Italy. That is the fundamental difference between the two men.

## CHAPTER XXVI

1929

### *A Party for our New House. Turkey, Syria and the Druses*

BACK IN LONDON—with Arthur returned from America—we had a party for our new house. We were by then so broke it seemed to us it did not matter what we did. So we sent out an invitation headed 'Sausages and Hope'. If the first failed, the last would be an accompaniment to beer. In the end we decided to have punch as well.

Everybody came to see the house. A good many were complete strangers. I heard a girl say to her partner, "It's no use your saying we ought to go. I won't go till I have seen that woman's bedroom."

"Do," I said sweetly, "but be careful not to slip. The marble is



very hard." The girl looked like a fish. Her mouth opened and shut silently just like the gills of a grassed salmon.

It is impossible to describe one's own parties. But *Vogue* wrote, "We knew it would be wonderful as soon as we caught sight of the cars filling Great Cumberland Place. . . . Our appetite and expectations increased as we said farewell to our hats. Mounting a staircase flanked with bronze leopards we saw lots of young men, but no hostess. No giant roared our names. No figure of pink armour shook us tepidly by the hand. For nowadays, at good parties like this, the hostess's attitude is, 'As you are asked—at least, I hope so—my house is yours. Greet me, enjoy yourselves, love me and leave me—all without fuss.' Mrs. McGrath waved an enormous red fan at us. She was all in red—taffetas and tulle—dancing with the Home Secretary."<sup>1</sup>

I do not remember my dress. Did the endearing 'Jix' dance? I do not think so, but he was always a great asset at a party, for he looked so pleased to be there. Other people thought they must be having fun too, so the contagion spread. I remember a flock of good-looking Guinnesses. They are all married now, some of them re-married. I thought the lovely Tanis looked a little like Nell Gwynn. Meraud, the painter, was a slender, dark young creature—a wax candle burning too quickly. The brilliant Zita—Guinness only by her mother's second marriage—was already in search of the improbable.

Irene Carisbrooke, whom I have admired since, on a pony, I tried to follow her big, bold horse arrowlike across Lincolnshire fences, looked well against our sunburned walls. Red-headed Mina Craven, with the eyes of a witch, occupied the attention of King George of Greece. He had just been chided—much to his amusement—by Sir George Clerk. That most punctilious of Ambassadors had been shooting in Transylvania with Queen Marie. Midway up our stairs, he felt someone pressing too close upon his heels. "Don't be in such a hurry, young man. You'll get there in time," he said. Silence suddenly surrounded him. He looked back over an admirably tailored shoulder and saw the son-in-law of his recent hostess.

I hope it was a good party, and that there were enough sausages to make 'hope' superfluous. One paper wrote that four chefs in white caps cooked the delectable pig's meat in eleven different ways, all of them succulent. I doubt the accuracy of this. But Ralph Blumenfeld, then editor of the *Daily Express*, wrote a poem which served for menu. It was called 'Rosita's Sausages', and ran:

*"Caviare is food for livers,  
Ortolans are lovers' fare,  
Onions, raw, prevent cold shivers,  
Plover's eggs are dear and rare.*

<sup>1</sup> Sir William Joynson-Hicks, later Lord Brentford.

*Bird's nest soup is gourmet's pleasure,  
 Terrapin exalts the soul;  
 Lobster Newburg is a treasure  
 Served up in a Nangping bowl.  
 But the choicest of all dishes  
 Succulent and sunburned brown,  
 Realizing all our wishes,  
 Turning off dyspepsia's frown,  
 Is the sausage, weird and mystic,  
 Heaven's gift of high renown.  
 Shut your eyes. Be realistic.  
 Ope your mouth—and gulp it down."*

Soon after the party, we came to our senses. We let our new house until Arthur made money in the City, and I sold a novel to be filmed by Cecil de Mille. It was a relief to be free of such exigent possessions. That house insisted on parties. We gave way whenever we lived in it, but such sojourns were limited to spring and early autumn. In the summers, we looked at Europe—from the houses, but not with the eyes, of our friends. During elongated winters, I went further afield. One of my most interesting journeys—for the *Daily Telegraph*—took me, in 1930-31, from Angora to the borders of Afghanistan. I wrote a book called *Conflict*. For I was impressed by the struggle between mediaevalism and industrialization, between feudalism and socialism, between old-established religions and the new Soviet faith, between the Koran and the Talmud—or more exactly between superstition and science—all over the Middle East. It was a case of 'rediscovery', so far as I was concerned. The Middle East had changed a great deal since I saw the first anti-Zionist riots at Jerusalem, or met Mustapha Kemal on the eve of his victories over the Greeks.

The new Turkey was established. Angora was exceedingly invigorating. Public buildings, policemen and omnibuses all looked alert and well scrubbed. But under the wireless towers—skeletons of civilization—a camel caravan bound for Samarkand, moved at an unchanging two miles an hour. In those days, the new town of Angora was delightedly American, but the citadel—which opposed the hordes of the White Sheep dynasty when the Tartars drove into Europe—took the place of skyscrapers.

After an official dinner the Comte de Chambrun offered to drive me back to the large, modern hotel. He was the French Ambassador. Later he married the brilliant Princess Murat. Still later, while *en poste* in Rome, he was shot at by a crazy young woman who accused him of interfering in her love affair with the Duce. I imagine de Chambrun remained imperturbable. He was always *à la hauteur de la situation*. That night in Angora, he said it was too early to go to bed. We must find somewhere to dance. He took off his orders and medals

and gave them to me to put into my bag. Then we began our search for a night-club. The chauffeur was rather shocked, but he took us to a café where there was an excellent pianist. Unfortunately, he was expected to play against a loud-speaker, which alternated house-keeperly advice with national songs. We drank good coffee and bad raki, while the Frenchman entertained me with tales of transition. Unveiled women were no longer throwing themselves into the Bosphorus after unsatisfactory love affairs, but they could not find the employment to which their new education entitled them. In the way of marriage, as of work, they wanted more than men could give. There were a hundred applicants for every post. Girls, hoping for careers, were thrust into the background. Middle-aged women were complaining, "In the old days, there was plenty of money. Now it is all so difficult." In Angora, there was a housing problem, for young couples would not live in old-fashioned intimacy with the husband's family. There was a servant problem, as slaves gradually disappeared. There was—naturally—the cultural problem which spread from Central Europe to Southern India. For the enthusiastic young people with their new and splendid degrees found themselves committed to their country's policy of self-preservation by means of rigorous insularity. At that time Turkey was opposed to all foreign contact, while imitating the most advanced foreign habits. She went ahead by the sheer force of Atatürk's will. He recognized no impossibilities and he had excellent material in the Turkish race. Hitler once said, "They are the best soldiers in the world because they fight as a matter of course, without thinking." They work in the same relentless way. In ten years, they had created the core of a new state, progressive and solid. "You will see," said the Comte de Chambrun, "Turkey is at the end of her mistakes. When Germany makes another war, she will get no help from Angora." The Ambassador seemed to be certain of war, so I asked him, "Can't you do anything to stop it?" He replied, "Diplomacy is in rags. We are so accustomed to expedients that we cannot endure reality. *Chère Madame*, you will live, I expect, to see a different relationship between nations, with which diplomacy will have nothing to do, but it will not come without war." "You speak as if war did not matter?" I protested. It was very late. Ambassatorial discretion was possibly relaxed. "It is not the worst that can happen," said the Frenchman.

I remember another evening in Angora. Rouf Bey, the Iraq Minister, gave a raki party for Atatürk and his friends. It began at half-past six and went on till the next morning. We sat on carpeted divans and were offered small glasses of raw alcohol. It was potent, but Turkish heads are strong. Water-pipes were distributed. Smoke thickened the air. It was very hot. The men gathered round a low table laden with bottles, with dishes of olives and goats' cheese. They discussed Ismet Pasha's finance bill. The women were relieved to

find themselves neglected, and still more relieved to be able to sit comfortably on their feet. Most of them still disliked chairs and being obliged to talk to men in public. I talked about Islam to a girl with a bad skin and very fine eyes, a protégé of Kemal, who was paying for her education. She was going to be a lawyer. "There must be something in religion," she said, "but we are too busy with all we have to do for Turkey to bother much about the future. There may be time later on——" It seems to me that for twenty years I have listened to ardent young nationalists, Russian, Indian, German, and Balkan saying much the same thing. When I spoke of internationalism the Turkish girl said, "We can't afford that. We must establish ourselves first." We were talking in French. With unexpected shrewdness she added, "*You* can afford to play with internationalism because you are so powerful. Russia also is big enough to risk nothing by such a policy, but a small country like ours must believe supremely in herself before she can allow herself to be interested in the rest of the world."

Some time during the night I listened to Atatürk speaking, with clarity and vigour, of what he wanted to do for Turkey. It was as if he took a century and made bread with it. Like President Roosevelt, he gave the impression of using words like yeast. To-morrow was being kneaded into the middle of to-day.

In the small hours, half awake, I heard a Member of the National Assembly telling how he represented Turkey—in a bowler hat and tweeds—at the Islamic Conference in Mecca. Rousing myself from among the hard bolsters, I asked how he had felt, dressed as an infidel in the sacred city. He retorted that he had been more concerned with apoplexy than excommunication. "The climate in Mecca may be holy, but it is certainly uncivilized," he concluded. His round red face was moist. His fez had slipped to a rakish angle. He exuded good temper, but his wits were keen. "It is only when you have lost the game in this life that you concern yourself with winning a hypothetical hand hereafter," he reflected. We had often played bridge together. The Turk was a keen gambler, but wary. I suspected that he would treat his God as a partner. But for the moment, his country was more important.

From modern Turkey, growing with as much energy as a provincial American city, I went to Syria and was shocked. For life had gone backwards. In Damascus, the Street called Straight which I had thought the hub of an Arab universe, was empty. The markets were deserted. The town was shabby and poor. I stayed with Nazek el Abed, the daughter of a local Pasha. She still wore the heavy black double veil, disastrous to sight. The feminist newspaper which she edited under tolerant Turkish rule, had been suppressed. Most of the schools were shut. France was uneasy and exigent, probably because she was disappointed. She had expected a welcome in Syria, but

except among the Christians of the Lebanon, she was unpopular. Every race in the unwillingly-mandated territory was obsessed by its own vision of independence.

In the harem of the el Abed house, Nazek—short, dark-eyed and serious, more interested in farming than in love—talked despairingly of her country. "The French," she said, "are clever, dishonest and afraid. We need the exact opposite in Syria. The Turks or the British could rule here—for both are honest, fearless and certainly not at all clever. We do not need subtlety and intrigue. We need to respect." So it went on. Sheikhs in the desert and merchants in the town said the same thing. The influence of Ibn Saud was growing. Nejd might take the part of Britain, said some of the tribal politicians.

From the sullen discontent of Syria under a mandate which she abhorred, I went to Jebel Druse. The war between France and the mountain warriors, worshippers of the Golden Calf, had ended. Sultan el Atrash, mighty and reckless leader, was in exile. Thousands of Druses had gone with him into the Arabian deserts, taking with them their families and flocks. For a while I stayed in the 'dark mountain', shunned by the few Frenchmen who bargained for peace rather than imposed it, and with the help of various Ajawids,<sup>1</sup> planned a visit to the exiled chieftain.

The Druses are a curious people. Their religion is one of the few secrets which have been kept for more than a thousand years. It is known that they believe in divine unity, in truth, in mutual assistance and in the holy war. They have seven teachers and seven sacred books, seven precepts, seven sections of knowledge, seven 'houses' or Circles, wherein the initiates (Ajawids) meet, and some of the elders grow their beards for seven years. No converts are accepted. No alien marriages are allowed. There are three classes, the 'spiritual', the 'ignorant' and the 'corporeal'. Only the first are initiated into the secret ritual. There are no visible mosques among the dark houses piled upon the mountain in honeycomb formation. It is known that a temple exists and that it contains a golden image of a calf, symbolic as the lamb of Christianity, but it has never been seen by the West. I was told that services are held first in one house then in another—so that nobody outside the privileged circle knows where to look for them.

The French would not let me leave Sueida, the Druse capital, for Azraq, beyond which Sultan el Atrash was encamped with his loyal warriors. So I hurried off to Amman in Trans-Jordan. There, through the underground information system of the Ajawids, I was expected. A car was ready. Before the British authorities could suspect my purpose, I had slipped away.

The party consisted of an Arab driver, muffled in an immense tasselled 'kufiya', a Druse who said he knew the way, a Bedouin armed with rifle and water-pipe, and myself.

<sup>1</sup> Religious leaders among the Druses.

"We must take the secret road," they said; "thus shall we avoid being questioned by the police."

So we plunged into a gully, through which it seemed impossible that any car could proceed, for there was no track at all and the boulders were as thick as pebbles on a beach.

During the first hour we covered six miles, but after that we found ourselves on the plains, where the Beni Sakhr pasture vast herds of camels, sheep and goats.

At the fiftieth mile we passed the last landmark between Trans-Jordan and the no-man's-land of Azraq—a mighty ruined fortress older than Islam.

"The only time I went inside," volunteered the driver, "someone tried to cut my throat." He made a realistic gesture and we decided not to venture within.

All day we drove across a waste of black stones. Occasionally, a dry wadi broke the monotony. Where stretches of sand were tufted with brittle, grey scrub, mirage transformed them into boats, trees and battlements. The ground was so hard that our wheels left no track, and towards sunset the inevitable happened. We lost the way.

The Arab drove in circles, protesting that we must soon come upon some trace of the camp we sought, till the Druse seized him by the throat. Frightful altercations ensued, followed by forlorn and futile pilgrimages to the summits of various hillocks from which there was nothing to be seen but the desert. On we went, heading towards Qaf, outpost of Ibn Saud. In the middle of a last deafening quarrel, in which the Bedouin predicted a terrible death for us all, black tents appeared in the one direction where my three companions had all agreed they could not possibly be.

"Wallah!" said the driver, whose mind evidently worked in a groove. "If it is the Druse camp, there should be white tents among the 'houses of hair'. These may be Wahabis, and if so they will cut our throats."

I thought it unlikely and ordered direct advance. That bee-line across scrub and hillocks nearly finished the car, but, as the sun sank, we reached the camp and were greeted by a pack of furious mongrels which flung themselves at the motor as if it had been a gazelle.

Thirty or forty camel-hair tents were scattered over a rise, with half a dozen squat mud towers guarding the outskirts. From the largest came a group of men, burned by wind and sun, marked by five relentless years on the border of starvation.

"Your coming is good. Welcome and welcome," said Sultan el Atrash, who is tall and dark, with a gigantic moustache. His heavy brows shelter the creased lids and keen eyes of a man who habitually scans a sunlit horizon, or peers along the barrel of a rifle.

We followed him into the tent, which was open on one side to the desolation of burned sand and sapless scrub. Thirty feet from where

we sat a tasselled woollen hanging shut off the women's quarters. In the middle of the floor, which was hard as stone, there was a sunken hearth. While we still murmured greetings, a boy came running with an armful of the grey brushwood. Soon there was a fire and mouthfuls of bitter coffee poured out of a long beaked pot.

"From whence did you come to the Wadi Sirhan?" asked our host.

We described our journey from Amman.

"What is this talk of Trans-Jordan?" asked our host. "I cannot think of Palestine, Syria, Iraq and all the other countries into which your people have divided Arabia. To me it is all one land and an Arab land."

Our cups were replenished. More and more dark figures stole into the tent, shuffling out of their shoes at the threshold, till some eighty warriors in worn camel-hair cloaks with white cotton 'kufiyas' bound over their heads sat round us and listened while Sultan el Atrash explained. "Under the Turks we were rich and life was easy. With one paper<sup>1</sup> a man could travel from Beirut to Aden. Now in a day's journey he must write his name in many different books.<sup>2</sup> Wallahi, how can the country prosper when there are so many different governments, each selling concessions to its own people, and a set of customs at the end of every march? Trade is dead, because Damascus is cut off from Jerusalem and both from Baghdad, yet all are members of the same family, dependent on the same fortune."

We asked him about the war, during which for two years, with a handful of untrained mountaineers, this Arab Napoleon defended his mountains against the whole might of France.

Sultan el Atrash clicked a string of amber beads between his fingers, but he neither smiled nor made any movement of his muscular frame hunched cross-legged under a brown 'abbaya'. "For many years we waited for the French to fulfil the promises under which they accepted the mandate. There was no end to our petitions for a national government, but the land for which we had fought, imagining to better ourselves by driving out the Turks, was no longer ours at all. Where there had been one official, there were twenty. Taxes were increased five or six times. Our gold was exchanged for paper money which deteriorated till it was worth a fifth of what we had paid for it. The officers who ordered us without reason had neither beards nor sense. Then one day they captured a guest to whom I had promised security, and I said to my people, 'Let us go and get him back.' So we went down and met a tank which was open because of the heat, and I leaped on the step and cut at the first head I saw. It was not a good fight because they were surprised, but it was the beginning of war."

"With an Englishman," reflected Sultan el Atrash, "one can talk, because he is ready to listen. But with a Frenchman it is no use, for at once he gets angry. The only argument for him is a bullet."

<sup>1</sup> Passport.

<sup>2</sup> District police regulations.

"Nobody can fight France," I said, and delivered a lecture on the resources of the West, but the Sultan was unconvinced.

"After a few months of war," he said, "France offered us the independence of Jebel Druse, but we replied that we would not make peace till the whole of Syria was united under a national government."

Once again I protested, "But what link is there between you Druses and the cosmopolitan Christians of the coast who are afraid of you and yet think themselves your superiors? Why should you sacrifice yourselves for those who play with politics?"

"We are all Arabs," returned my host, "and we are gradually becoming wiser. We are learning that we must not waste time fighting each other. And we are sending our sons to be educated, many of them in Europe and America, so that they may learn Western knowledge. In a generation there will be no difference between us and the men of the coast. We speak the same language and soon we shall all think the same thoughts."

"But meanwhile, what are you going to do? You can't live always in this wildness, without crops or flocks." I looked out at the moonlit aridity where one would imagine nothing human or animal could exist.

"We are used to hardship," replied Saya Bey el Atrash, the brother of Sultan. "During the war we slept on stones and ate locusts and at the end, when we were seeking water in the desert, we had to drink the blood of our horses to save us from death."

When his voice ceased, there was no sound in the great tent but the click of the Sultan's beads and the mutter of a rising wind.

## CHAPTER XXVII

1929

### *Hebrew and Arab Palestine. King Feisul in Iraq*

FROM THE DESERT, where the Sultan's wife, aged twenty-three, shared her tent with me, I went to Palestine. It had become an extraordinary combination of East and West. The Jewish zone was impressive. It represented a prosperous and glowing future. The Arabs were still in the days of Abraham. A thousand years of progress was sufficient barrier between the two races who claimed the same ancestors and the same prophets. I remember when King Feisul of Iraq was luncheon with the old Duke of Portland and Lord Albemarle, the conversation turned to genealogy. Bentincks and Keppels were proud of their ancient Dutch blood. The Duke asked his principal guest if Arabs recorded their family trees. "Yes," said Feisul, intent on the excellent food. "From whom does Your Majesty trace descent?" asked the



Duke politely, but with the air of including a small boy in a grown-up game. "From Noah," said the King, his mouth regrettably full. There was startled silence. Hurriedly I explained that Ishmael, the son of Hagar, lost in the deserts of what is now the Hedjaz, had been preserved from death by the mystic water of Zem-Zem. This well is now within the precincts of the sacred Ka-aba in Mecca. According to Arab historians, Ishmael married the daughter of the King of the Koreish, from which ruling family, Feisul and the Sherifian house which reigns to-day in Iraq and Trans-Jordan, are undoubtedly descended. "Dear me," said the Duke mildly. "That makes us all seem very new and unfinished."

In Palestine, Arabs and Jews arguing over pre-historical origins, are apt to go back quite as far to prove their rights in the land. It is always sad to listen. For each people have their own inspiration.

In Haifa I was driven by a young Jew. He was small and delicate. His clothes were very shabby and he had no overcoat, though the wind was like a knife. He told me he had been a student in Prague, and that had he stayed there he could eventually have earned several hundred a year in the electrical works where his father was already employed. In Palestine he just managed to keep body and soul together, for the competition is rendered excessive by constant immigration.

"Are you happy here?" I asked.

"How should I not be?" he replied. "It is the land of Israel." His eyes held the light which the fishermen of Judea would have recognized nearly two thousand years ago.

No appeal of logic or justice, no criticism, hardship or ill-treatment, not martyrdom itself, can prevail against that particular spirit. The Arabs must realize the force against which they are fighting. It is backed by the wealth of the world, with a consequent political power no government can afford to ignore, but it is not wholly material.

All over Palestine I searched for an East End Jew, and at last I found him among the orange groves at Rahovat. He had been a furrier in the Mile End Road and had worked up from a barrow, where he sold bits of glued rabbit and hare, to a shop with two assistants, but unlike the majority of his contemporaries, for there are very few English Jews in Palestine, his mind was fixed on Eretz Israel. It happened that his shop was burned, and with the insurance money he was able to transplant his family to Judea. He bought three acres and planted fruit trees, but a plague of locusts destroyed his first crop. So he pledged his land and started again, adding a few cows whose milk he sold in the neighbouring town. By dint of working from 4 a.m., when the dairy first needed his attentions, till long after sunset, when the last locusts bunched themselves for the night, he contrived to make both ends meet, but he had no pleasures whatever. He told me that he missed the lights of the Mile End Road and the company of the

moving crowds. When he shut his eyes he saw the friendly flares sputtering over the barrows on Saturday nights, but it never occurred to him to go back.

"When I was a young man," he said, "I used to go to Zionist meetings in an attic in Whitechapel, and like as not we'd find a notice to say the rent was unpaid. There we'd be with our coats buttoned up because we hadn't any shirts and nothing in our pockets but the price of the next meal, but we'd turn them out to satisfy the landlord and go hungry, for those meetings were a lot more important to us than food."

In Palestine, the average Arab regards the advent of foreign-speaking aliens much as he does the plague of locusts which lay bare his land. To his slow-moving mind he is being exploited for the benefit of Europeans, who have no right to the country which has belonged to him for so many hundred years that he has forgotten the need for title-deeds. Actually he is being slowly beggared by the inevitable forces of modernity, but to the Arab peasant, unchanged since the days of Abraham, it is the mills of Zionism, not of science, in which he is being ground.

I repeat that a solution is impossible till the Arab realizes the nature of the force which has developed and transformed the Jewish zone.

The communal colonies at Dilbh and Ain Herod were my introduction to the design with which for twenty-five years Soviet Russia has been experimenting. After this war I think it will be the pattern for most of Europe. It may be modified by greater understanding and toleration and by much closer co-operation with the peoples of the West, but it is lustrous with the force of its growth. And it is still new and pliable, so that youth can find in it both inspiration and impetus to labour.

At Dilbh, I found a number of enthusiastic and highly educated young people, all from the Ukraine, living in the utmost simplicity. As a result of incessant hard work, they had built and sparsely furnished a series of pleasant yellow-washed houses with tiled roofs, each containing four to six rooms. These were assigned to the married couples, or rather to those couples who had signified at the weekly meeting that they intended to live together. For there was then neither Rabbi nor synagogue in a communal colony, and youth paid little heed to formalities it considered old-fashioned.

The unmarried men and girls slept in dormitories.

The men wore Russian blouses buttoned on the shoulders. While at work in the hen-house or dairy, gardening, cleaning, bee-keeping, or tending the vines for which Dilbh is famous, the women put on wide black bloomers, sandals and sweaters. In the evenings, they appeared in cotton frocks or checked overalls. I saw no jewellery or attempt at adornment.

The men averaged eleven working hours a day and the women

eight. Between them they cultivated five hundred acres, half of which is good land and half sterile mountain soil. There were terraces of fruit trees and an attempt at afforestation was being made, but outside the famous table-grapes, from which the colony derived its name, its chief sources of wealth were white Leghorns and cattle of crossed Friesland and Syrian stock.

All work was done in rotation. It was apportioned at the Saturday general meeting, at which men and women had an equal voice. In all the communal colonies, stress was laid on complete equality between the sexes, and everything possible was done to free women from unnecessary domesticity. The children spent the day in a crèche or kindergarten, according to their ages. They were looked after by specially selected young women, and they all seemed happy, healthy and intelligent. At night the parents took them home and on Saturdays they went out in family groups, but obviously some form of birth-control was practised. Few couples had more than one child.

Four women ran the communal kitchen and bakery. Others took their turn in the laundry. When I visited Dilbh, it was in the process of cleaning for the Passover Feast. Everyone was working overtime. I thought it a gallant life but a very hard one. The women seemed to age prematurely. They used neither powder nor paint.

When the colony was started in 1922, I think the settlers were all unmarried. Belonging to the same Socialist organization in the Ukraine, they decided, in spite of parental opposition, to emigrate to what they regarded as a national rather than a religious home. They were free-thinkers, but they wanted to create something enduringly Hebrew out of Hebrew soil.

Their whole life—as I saw it—was a complete negation of the necessity for either mental or physical luxury. At first they had meat only once a week. Later they could afford it more often, but their meals consisted chiefly of bread, milk, vegetables and pastes made of flour and water. They drank no wine. All that they made went back into the land, or was devoted to the children whose house was by far the nicest in the colony. There, simple toys were shared by all alike. Gay drawings decorated the walls. The charming toy furniture was home-made and covered with white oil-cloth. White muslin curtains fluttered against the open windows. Shiny white baths were regarded by the children as the best joke of the day.

Dilbh had no currency, for nobody earned or disposed of any money. It was part of the women's work to keep the general store supplied with simple garments and there was an adequate bootmaker among the men. Anybody who wanted new clothing stated his or her need at the Saturday meeting, and was given an order on the store.

Ain Herod was then, I believe, the largest communal colony. It comprised a population of approximately 250, and farmed three thousand acres.

I saw an excellent library, where Galsworthy was the most popular novelist and war books had no success at all. "We are not interested in fighting," one of the workers told me. He was leaning against a table in the communal dining-room. The whitewashed walls were hung with modern drawings, with wind, temperature and moisture charts, with lists of work and the findings of Courts of Honour. "We mean to make something good here for our children to take on after us. No, we don't want a synagogue. Dr. Weizmann himself said that Zionism must be a-religious. The new Hebrew University is our synagogue, and in the library here, we read Freud, Proust and Karl Marx, Einstein of course, though we don't always understand him, Wells, Ludwig and Pirandello."

"But don't you miss the stimulus of college and city life?" I asked the thin and earnest young man in dungarees.

"No. We're awfully keen on science, but all this culture Europe makes such a fuss over is a matter of hair-splitting. We've got beyond it. You see," smiling, "we've got a superiority complex." He told me how the colony bootmaker was apt to sing Schubert and Schumann while he worked most of the night, with a boy accompanying him on a zither.

Each year Ain Herod elects a committee to organize its work, and on this men and women are equally represented. Five judges are also elected to preside at the Courts of Honour. Of these, two at least must be women. Punishment is in the form of censure, a term of the more disagreeable labour, exclusion from the library, the communal room, or from any particular group. By a unanimous verdict the offender could be exiled from the settlement.

Every worker had the right to bring his parents to live in the colony. Generally there was a special building called 'The Parents' House', for the older Jews were orthodox with regard to food and religious observances. So they lived their own lives apart from their thoroughly modern offspring on whose labour they depended for food and lodging.

Sometimes the young people built a synagogue for their elders. They did this in the same spirit that they built them a kitchen and a dining-room. Into these came nothing that did not 'part the hoof and chew the cud'. But children and grandchildren were too busy with this life to think about the next. Sometimes, when a child was expected, they inscribed their union in the nearest Rabbinical book, but their hard-working communal life, healthy and natural, had robbed sex of prudery, mystery and chivalry. Men and women were comrades.

Half a dozen boys and a couple of girls might have travelled half over Europe together, inspired by a vision of Israel. When they achieved their purpose they were not going to separate because of convention. At Beit Alpha, then regarded as the most advanced colony, boys and girls used to sleep in the same dormitories. When it

was decided to discontinue this practice, one sturdy young pioneer left, declaring with indignation that she was against such "ridiculous reactionary propaganda". Thus the communal colony of Zionism had established—on a Russian pattern—a new and simple relationship between the sexes. It had also made a bold attempt to give woman the same interests and opportunities as man. In those farms, I saw the best of Zionist Palestine. It was very moving. It was exactly like co-operative life in the Soviet Union. Tel el Aviv, the Jewish port, with its new industries, which to-day include an arsenal and munitions plant, was impressive and exhilarating. But my sympathies were with the young farmers developing out of Hebrew soil the model for future communal civilization.

Thoughtfully, I made my way to Iraq. Time had not blurred my vision of a united Arabia, but I realized that the clock could not be put back. Zionism had created new conditions of living and of thought in Palestine. If the Arabs could not fit into the modern pattern, they would have to withdraw within definite boundaries. British Commissions, one after another, had agreed on partition of the Holy Land. It seems to me that Jerusalem should belong to no race and to no creed. It is the holy city of the world, sacred to three great faiths, Jewry, Islam and Christianity. The rest of the little, arid country could be divided into zones, as at present arranged. Gradually, as science develops the desert, the Arabs might be willing to withdraw across the Jordan. Unity of the whole peninsula, independence from Iraq and Hadramaut to Syria might recompense them for losing most of Palestine. This seems to be the objective for which we could all work. It is not the slightest use paying the Arab for the expropriation of Palestinian land unless he can be settled elsewhere on soil equally familiar. For money means nothing to the Moslem farmer. He spends it at once. Then he starves or steals. He must own the acres on which and by which he lives. If Zionist leaders could realize this, it would be helpful to our statesmen and officials who—with the utmost patience and sincerity—have been trying for a quarter of a century to find a just compromise between the national ambitions of Jew and Arab.

In Baghdad I stayed with Colonel Cornwallis and Major Edmunds, in a house on the Tigris. There were tall palm-trees growing out of mown grass, with flowers tucked round their toes. It was the first time I had seen date-palms without sand.

On the wide, smooth brown river, the traffic of the new nation was borne. Extraordinary round boats, like padded umbrellas upside-down, were manœuvred across the stream. Camels paced slowly down to the wharves. The huge Nairn lorries which had made the desert track from Damascus, mingled their horns with donkey bells and the calls of the Muezzin from the minarets.

King Feisul used to come and dine and the four of us played bridge.

Most afternoons, I went out to his farm beside the river. We talked of ourselves and our friends and the difficulties of our countries. Feisul believed that his friend Cornwallis could make England see the necessity for turning the unpopular mandate into a treaty. He told me of the new Arab saying, "The mandate is a guest which has stayed too long. It is stale as the food of three days ago." All over the Moslem East, hospitality is extended to strangers for the period of three sunsets. After that, it is supposed that the 'bread and salt' eaten on the first night has left the body. The host is free of further responsibility. The guest must depart.

One afternoon King Feisul said to me impatiently: "Why must my friends all leave me? If you had married Cornwallis, you could have been a sister in my house." Arabs enjoy planning the most impossible marriages. A delightful old sheikh decided that Gertrude Bell and Colonel Lawrence would make an ideal pair, and the brilliant woman who did a man's work in Iraq had to explain that she was too old for match-making.

Sitting beside the Tigris in the late afternoon sun, I realized how Iraq had taken toll of Feisul's vitality. He was exhausted before the summer heat had begun. But his enthusiasms kept him alert. The coveted treaty between Iraq and England was the vision he was afraid might become a nightmare. He was an astute politician, but not strong enough to keep a straight course between so many intrigues. I believe he was a good judge of men, but he allowed himself to be persuaded into the acceptance of second-best.

We used to ride together sometimes, when it was cool. The King lent me stallions with half-moon ears, nervous and delicate as cats. They were frightened of their own shadows. One day, riding along an embankment almost as narrow as a wall and very high above the fields, I saw the King coming to meet me. There was no room to pass or to turn. Already my animal was half over the edge with excitement. Feisul checked his horse, brought it straight up on its hind legs and, by a feat I have not seen equalled, swung it round so that it came down facing in the opposite direction. "I have not forgotten my Bedouin training," he called over his shoulder.

Slowly we rode. Very soon, it always seemed to me, we were back at the farm. It was the King's refuge from politicians of all parties. Furnished with aggressive modern angles, I thought it very uncomfortable. While I tried to adjust myself to the uncompromising leanness of his chairs, I asked Feisul why he liked them. He replied, "I have to live ahead of the times in order to induce my people to live up to them." For this reason he experimented with scientific agriculture and whenever possible travelled by air. He would have preferred a tent and a camel. "My difficulties," he said, "are not likely to grow less. For the young nationalists will only talk of the treaty, the League of Nations, oil and irrigation. The old sheikhs and the fanatics

from the Holy Cities consider all these belong to the devil. They are hard as drought and I can't change them."

It was in London, years later, that I next saw King Feisul. He was very happy. He felt that the treaty by which his country's independence had been secured was his work. He was delighted with the reception accorded him. "It is strange," he said to me, laughing like a boy, "that I, a Bedouin, should be staying at Buckingham Palace. But your King is delightful and so easy to get on with. At first I was frightened of making mistakes, so I said nothing at all, but very soon I found myself as much at home as if I were talking to Ibn Saud."

The compliment was great, for Feisul had been much impressed by the personality of his great Arabian rival. When, after considerable difficulty, a meeting was arranged for them on a British battleship.

"In England everybody looks so young," continued Feisul. "Why don't *you* get old? You haven't changed at all since you made that appeal for peace in the Damascus Parliament, how many years ago, thirteen, wasn't it?"

"An unlucky number," I reflected. Feisul nodded. "I shan't be alive in another thirteen years," he said with sudden seriousness. Urgently he spoke of his plans for increasing the population of Iraq, for settling near Baghdad the Druse warriors exiled from Syria, and for a Customs agreement with Palestine by which his country's trade might find an outlet to the Mediterranean.

"I came to England for a holiday," he said, "but I've worked so hard here being entertained—your hospitality is prodigious—that I shall have to go back to Iraq for that holiday."

But King Feisul had no holiday.

He returned to his own country to find Assyrian and Arab fighting on the frontier. Christian villages were being pillaged by Moslem troops. His sudden death followed close upon the breach in the edifice to whose building he sacrificed freedom, leisure, health and perhaps life.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

1929

### *Oil, Islam and the Shah of Persia*

BY WAY OF THE HOLY CITIES, Kerbela and Nejef, I went to the Persian oil-fields. It seems to me now that on that journey I took prophetic glances into the future. At Nejef, I saw whole families living underground as they did during the nights of 1940. But it was the torrid heat of summer, not German bombing, which developed mole-like

ingenuity among the Ghias. When my infidel brogue impinged upon the paving-stones under the great mosaic gateway leading to Ali's mosque, a sullen murmur swelled among the crowd. Pale fanatics, sick with drugs and dirt, pressed around me. Age-old hatred flared in eyes habitually dulled by opium. But the same people became quite amiable when I asked to see their subterranean dwellings. Preceded by a lantern, I went down the shaft of an old well. At the bottom, hollowed out of the earth, were great columned apartments, still warm from the sun-baked streets over our heads. Further down we went, by sloping tunnels and flights of mud steps. Here, the chambers were somewhat cooler, low-roofed, and decorated with tiles or frescoes. Still lower, five stories under the town, we reached a temperate climate. No bomb could disturb those rooms, or the passages stretching from one house to another. Here and there was a cavern or ancient well called 'the house of a wind'.

With the first summer heat, carpets, tea-pots and water-pipes, bedding and copies of the Koran were brought down to these underground houses. Storm-swept nights, when the flying sand made sleeping on the roofs impossible, were quiet and still in the heart of the earth. As the sun beat fiercer upon the desert-leaguered town, the people moved one story deeper underground. "The virtuous are exceedingly difficult to argue with," said a modern young doctor who had just established his family at the bottom of a well, "but the further they descend from the holiness above, the more sensible they become!"

I thought it a delightful remark and remembered it among the oil-wells in Persia.

Islam and oil are the two strongest influences in the country which the last Shah evolved from divergent tribal interests. Which will have the most enduring effect on the mental and political development of the people it is hard to say. Islam has never encouraged the spiritual or even the material advancement of a race except by the sword. Persia has always appreciated the moral value, the inspiration and the pleasure of war, while leaving business as much as possible in the hands of Jews, Zoroastrians and Armenian Christians. The young modernists I met believed in Reza Shah and in oil. A few of them were just beginning to believe in themselves. In their fellows, they had no confidence at all.

Abadan, capital of the oil-fields, had come straight out of an American catalogue. Its religion was FUEL. Prospectors were its missionaries and the managerial board its episcopacy. There was no god but the pipe-line—which to-day supplies the fighting fronts from Burmah to the Mediterranean. Every scientist in Abadan was a prophet. For Hitler was right when he said, "The power which holds the oil of Central Asia, holds also dominion over the next thousand years of history."



At Fields, centre of the wells, with their tall skeleton derricks standing like gibbets over the drillings, I used to climb in moonlight on to a hill. From this high place, once sacred to Baal, I looked down upon a 'city of dreadful night'. Far beyond the orderly sophistication of brilliantly-lit streets, of garages, plants, fire-stations and stores, oil-flares sent leaping shadows across the mountains. Earth and sky were alive. An answering blaze came from Haft Kel, fifty miles away. As the flares rolled upwards fire billowed into the clouds. It seemed to tumble over and over before it reached the heavens. There was advance and retreat of shadow armies. Darkness fled, tormented. The mountains were ravaged and laid bare. Triumphant and appalling, the torches of Baal were relit. Ten years later, I saw the docks of London burn. There was the same madness of oil let loose. It blazed across the Thames and flung red pillars high above the city roofs.

By the road which is now the Allies' main supply route to Russia, I drove north. The railway from the Persian Gulf and the Shatt el Arab to the Caspian—which can now carry three thousand tons of war material a day to the Soviet frontier—was not yet completed. Its toy gauge fell off the embankments, its sleepers split and its rails buckled according to the violence of summer and winter extremes.

At Dizful I stayed in a mud house above the river. It shook whenever the wind blew. The city belonged to the middle-aged and the blind. Hardly anyone had more than one good eye. Many families had not a seeing eye among three generations. The cobbled streets echoed to the tap-tapping of blind men's sticks. Dizful had been the capital of the 'bad lands'. It was accustomed to famine and disease, to raiding and rapine, before the Cossack soldier, Reza Khan, seized the Peacock throne and established harsh and expensive security throughout Iran. It was still intensely fanatical. Its people could neither read nor write. The average rate of living was five shillings a week. Twenty or more families lived in an intensity of dirt and stench in each blind, mud-walled house, devoid of sanitation. Food consisted of bread thin as sheets of brown paper, goats' cheese and curdled milk called 'dogh'. A Persian proverb says, "Each glass of dogh contains an extra year of life."

Since the war became a reality ten million pounds worth of Australian rolling stock have gone across the Persian hills, where the Lurs still worship Baal among the High Places. Machinery, tin, rubber, munitions, food, army clothing, big guns and rifles have passed through the narrow streets of Dizful. Its pilgrim caravanserais have been turned into garages and its tombs into storage for 'spares'. Its 'holy places' do repairs. Its markets sell alcohol and tobacco, forbidden to the puritans of Islam.

Qum, where fifteen hundred saints are buried under water-blue and water-green domes, is to-day an equally important hub of mechanical activity. Thousands of trucks, belonging to the U.K.C.C.

—formed to fight the Axis in Asia on a commercial front—roar over the cobbles which threatened my borrowed car. In 1930 Qum still abhorred the infidel and the stranger. There I stayed in the house of a singularly religious friend. He did not approve the emancipation of women, and after a third cup of ceremonial tea, he voiced his feelings. "Never, never shall it be decent for any woman to read or write," he thundered. Everyone listened respectfully because he was a Mujtahid, famed for so much learning and holiness that pilgrims visiting the sacred city, considered his blessing almost as important as a journey to the tomb of Fatima the Immaculate.<sup>1</sup>

He was an old man with a grey beard, hennaed in deference to the wishes of his youngest wife. He wore a long white robe not unlike a nightshirt, and a turban of the vivid emerald green which signifies that the wearer has made pilgrimage to Mecca. He had consented to entertain me in deference to the wishes of a merchant whose house overflowed with wedding guests. But after satisfying his instinct for hospitality by providing me with what he called "an unworthy and inadequate meal," consisting of one sheep, two lambs, five chickens, a sack of rice, several mountains of vegetables and a veritable sea of sour buffalo milk, he voiced his horror of modern woman. Subsequently, unable to mention the 'anderun'<sup>2</sup> or its occupants before the other wiseacres whom he had invited to drink sweet Persian tea and smoke water-pipes, while an invisible lute challenged the nightingales in a thicket of white roses, he pushed me, without any explanation, through a door which I had not previously observed.

It shut firmly behind me and I found myself in what might well have been an entirely separate house. A wide veranda ran round four sides of a court in which there was a sunken tank surrounded by pomegranates in flower, orange trees and flaming scarlet creepers. The stars were just coming out in the square of sky that could be seen. Carpets were spread on the tiled floor and a group of women of all ages sat cross-legged upon them or leaned against the hard, Eastern bolsters which always seem to be stuffed with young potatoes.

My hostess rose awkwardly and gave my hand an uncertain shake. She was probably quite young and she must have been beautiful, for she had the green eyes of a Circassian set in a pale face, finely modelled, with straight features, but her hair hung in crimson wisps. Kohl was smeared down to her cheek-bones. Her fingers had been dipped in paste made of marigolds and henna, and the palms of her hands, her toes and the lobes of her ears were dyed the same fierce orange. Unfortunately, she could only talk Turkish and a few words of Persian, so we were unable to do more than gesture our interest in each other. For some minutes we sat in silence, while the lady of the house sucked at the amber mouthpiece of a kalyan, in which the rose-water bubbled.

<sup>1</sup> Daughter of the prophet Mohamed.

<sup>2</sup> Persian for harem.

The usual glasses of strong tea were brought to me, with a saucer of rose-leaf jam and some long, loosely-rolled Persian cigarettes. Then a girl in a very short cotton frock with bobbed brown hair spoke to me in halting Arabic. It transpired that her mother came from Iraq and that both regarded the life of the fanatical city wherein they now lived much as a co-educated collegiate might consider 'Slocum-in-the-Mud'.

She translated for me and I learned that the painted lady was the mother of my host's three sons and therefore secure in her position. A few years ago she had selected from among her friends another wife for a husband whose attentions had become too exigent. The girl had proved delicate, so she had been supplanted by a mere child, apple-checked and plump, grand-niece of a Persian Shah.

There she sat—splendid in a flowered muslin robe under a long coat of sapphire and gold brocade. She tinkled with heavy gold jewellery and her smooth dark head was surmounted by a turban tasselled and decorated with gold coins.

Most of the other women were visitors, still wrapped in their 'chadours',<sup>1</sup> with the quaint little black horsehair visors under which they look out at a narrow strip of life, pushed up on to their foreheads. They were very polite and pressed upon me all sorts of things to eat, from melon seeds, whose regular cracking made an accompaniment to their speech, to sherbet which is a sort of fruit squash. Servants leaned against the wall, or sat on their haunches and stared at me, joining in the conversation whenever it pleased them.

At last a number of opium pipes were brought, and a girl kneaded the sticky brown pellets above a fragment of charcoal in a wire sieve which she swung about in the air to induce a glow.

The first pipe was offered to me. Stimulated by curiosity and a little fear, I accepted it. The smoke stuck in my throat and I choked. The women laughed at me and showed me how I must inhale deeply and slowly. After a while I felt a mild benignity. I was no longer bored with the interminable repetition of question and answer, punctuated by long silences. I did not care whether I slept or not. Life was quite agreeable, though bereft of past and future.

While we smoked, the servants had been spreading thick vividly-coloured quilts on the flat roof, surrounded by a wall which ensured privacy. When I had reached a stage in which I was not conscious of existing separately from the floor on which I sat and the bolster against which I leaned, there was a stir among the women. Some slipped away through a passage which led eventually to the street—black formless shadows among blind walls. The others climbed by means of ladder-like steps on to the roof, where my hostess offered me a choice of quilts. I selected a violet one with a royal purple bolster, and wondered vaguely how much clothing I was expected to remove. The

<sup>1</sup> Persian woman's cloak-like street dress.

women settled the question by tucking themselves, fully dressed, between their wadded coverings. They drew these well over their heads in spite of the intense heat, so that soon the roof looked as if large, brilliantly-coloured cocoons had been dropped all over it. A servant went among the sleepers with a silver censer which she thrust under each quilt in turn. Its strongly perfumed smoke eddied among my dreams and added to their confusion.

Sunrise stirred the 'anderun' roof to reluctant activity. Strained white faces yawned upon unyielding pillows. One by one the women dragged themselves from the cocoons of scarlet, orange and petunia. Children whom I had not noticed the previous night emerged from what was now a litter of exotic bedding. They were seized by their mothers, shaken and patted into comparative tidiness.

I felt that only a cold bath would save me. The girl in the European cotton frock had gone home to an 'anderun' with brass beds, muslin frills and pink bows, Germanic illustrations of Shakespeare on the walls, and on a chenille-fringed tablecloth the Eastern equivalent of an aspidistra. But when I expressed my desire for a large basin and much water—in Persia this usually produces the family baking-tin, which serves admirably as a bath—a servant whose eyebrows had been plucked and a black streak substituted right across the forehead from one ear to another, led me to a tank sunk in the tiled floor. There was a good deal of rustling up above, and it occurred to me that the whole of the household proposed to watch my ablutions. The water was dark and turgid, but the servant encouraged me to undress and to lower myself, gingerly, into unplumbed depths. Clutching the stone rim, I stretched out a cautious foot. Lower and lower went my inquiring toes till they touched a substance soft and squelchy. The squeal with which I leaped out of the tank startled my companions. Explanations followed, but I could not understand them. Finally, with many comforting gestures, the girl produced a pole with which she fished out the body of a very dead cat. Smiling cheerfully, she then invited me to proceed with my bath.

Unwashed, I continued my journey to Tehran.

There I stayed with Tommy and Virginia Jacks. He was Resident Director of Persian Oil and a power in the land. Virginia was—and is—lovely as celandines and pale golden primulas. They had a delightful house, replete with baths, and they were vastly hospitable. As soon as I arrived, they offered me kidneys on toast and coffee, but indicated that I should first—and with thoroughness—wash. Indeed I was very dirty. It seems to me that when not under the Jacks' roof, I was dirtier in Persia than in any other country.

Virginia introduced me to Prince Teymouratche, the subtle and wary and terribly civilized Court Minister married to a good-looking Russian. He was ingenious, but not sufficiently so to evade a mysterious death in prison some years later. Tommy arranged for me to have an

audience with the Shah. At that time he was on the flood-tide of his reforms, greedy and ruthless no doubt, but a patriot and a strong man. He was equally frightened of Britain and of Russia. "I want my people to be good Persians," he said. "They must learn to do without foreigners. I don't want to turn them into bad copies of Europeans." I remember him as a tall man, heavy and imposing, slow of speech, giving an impression of thoughtful calm. He received me in a study in the summer palace. The panelling was so finely inlaid with mother-of-pearl that it looked like silk embroidery. "The two great evils from which a country can suffer," said the Shah, "are foreign control and Communism." Strangely enough, in view of his pro-German attitude at the beginning of this war, he added, "If Persia had to choose between the two, I should be the first to put myself at the head of a Communist army." I left the Shah standing on a marble porch hung, like the nest of an eagle, over descending terraces. Behind him was an audience room, panelled and roofed with encrusted mirrors, whose thousand facets reflected the sun. Below him Tehran in the plain was spread like an historical carpet. In the distance Mount Demavend, the Fujiyama of Persia, raised a dazzling white cone above successive ranges. His Majesty called me back to admire the view. A military 'plane wheeled into the sky, and the Shah watched its flight. "The army has been the first step," he said. "It has prepared the ground."

"And fenced it . . ." I interpolated.

The Shah smiled. "I am a soldier, not a diplomat," he said.

## CHAPTER XXIX

1929

### *Desert and Holy City—in Persia*

FROM TEHRAN, I drove all the way round Persia on a succession of lorries. They carried all sorts of cargoes—carpets for India, sickening spices or drugs, commonplace china ware of blatant domestic intentions, pilgrims for the holy cities, 'dry goods' from Manchester, cotton from Turkestan, sugar from Russia, evil smelling asafoetida to Baluchistan. With men of every race and of several religions, occasionally with veiled women, I travelled some five thousand miles, paying the equivalent of a pound a day for part of a seat. Persia seemed to me divided between centuries far apart. Except in the great blank spaces of the 'Sea of Sand' and the 'Sea of Salt', desert tracks were beginning to develop into roads. Trucks were bought on the hire purchase system. In varying states of decay they scurried over the wilderness of hills and desert sharply separating the towns, plentiful as beetles, battered as war veterans. The majority of the drivers were Armenians, with a

sprinkling of Russians, Turks, Afghans, Baluchis and Sikhs, but the passengers were Persians, whether neatly tweeded or wrapped in diverse folds. They talked politics and business, or smoked opium. They descended at intervals to pray, or to help change the tyres, but whatever their costume and creed, at certain moments they were completely united. That was when they drank tea. In fact, on those five thousand miles I found but one fundamental unity, and it was expressed in the tea-khané, shortly no doubt to be interpreted by a Thermos flask.

With a charming and very learned young Persian who had married a granddaughter of Shah Nasr ed Din, I wandered round Isfahan. It is one of the most beautiful places in the world. Its charm is emphasized by its loneliness. For, as is usual with Persian cities, it stands far from any other inhabited place—a garden in mid-desert. Across unending sand or harsh dun pasture, shorn by dark flocks, the domes and minarets rise as a vision at the end of a laborious day.

"The Isfahanis are very mean," said my companion. "It's in the air. If a Tehrani comes here, he catches the infection. It is hard to do business, though an Isfahani will sell anything, his own or somebody else's—at a price. I know a very rich man who, with a curtain ring, tests every egg bought by his cook. If the egg is small enough to pass through the ring, it is promptly returned to the bazaar. When the late Shah visited Isfahan he halted at a village outside and said to his courtiers, 'If you want anything from me, ask for it now, but be silent when we reach the city.'"

"The Persian is the best liar in the world," continued my friend, engagingly frank. "He thinks it is stupid to tell the truth and he prides himself on evading it as far as possible."

With this remark in mind, I was not surprised when the driver of the motor-truck, which was to take me to Shiraz, arrived three hours late with a host of such ingenious excuses that it was impossible to blame him.

On the top of huge bales of cotton sprawled the half-dozen passengers, among whom were an Arab with a sense of humour and a veiled Persian woman who smoked steadily for seven hours.

As we left Isfahan the sun was slanting over the red desert. The hills were sudden outbursts of sharp red rock.

It was dark when, averaging twelve and a half miles an hour, the overloaded truck jolted into Yezdikhast, which means 'God willed it'. This amazing village consists of tiers of mud-built hovels projecting from either side of a boat-shaped rock some hundred and fifty feet high, which stands in the middle of a ravine.

In this most unsuitable spot, the driver, wild-eyed and stammering, proposed to spend the night. "There are robbers on the road," he said without the slightest truth. His miserable passengers rebelled. "He wants to smoke opium," explained the Arab, and even the Persian lady burst into speech. For protection against the imaginary

robbers, three soldiers were piled on top of the human mass within the wire grid which enclosed the truck at sides and back. The driver, forced from his 'dreams of a soul's disentanglement', flung himself on the seat beside me. With a screech of gears, we bumped into the night.

Bruised and breathless, I held on with both hands while we charged what appeared to be an endless series of walls and ditches.

At intervals, the Arab murmured information. "All drivers on the southern roads take opium or cocaine, otherwise their nerve would break. On the Shiraz-Bushire road, which is the worst in the world, there is one pass called 'the old woman' with a hundred and thirty-two (hairpin) turns in eight miles, and at each turn a lorry must back ten or eleven times to get round."

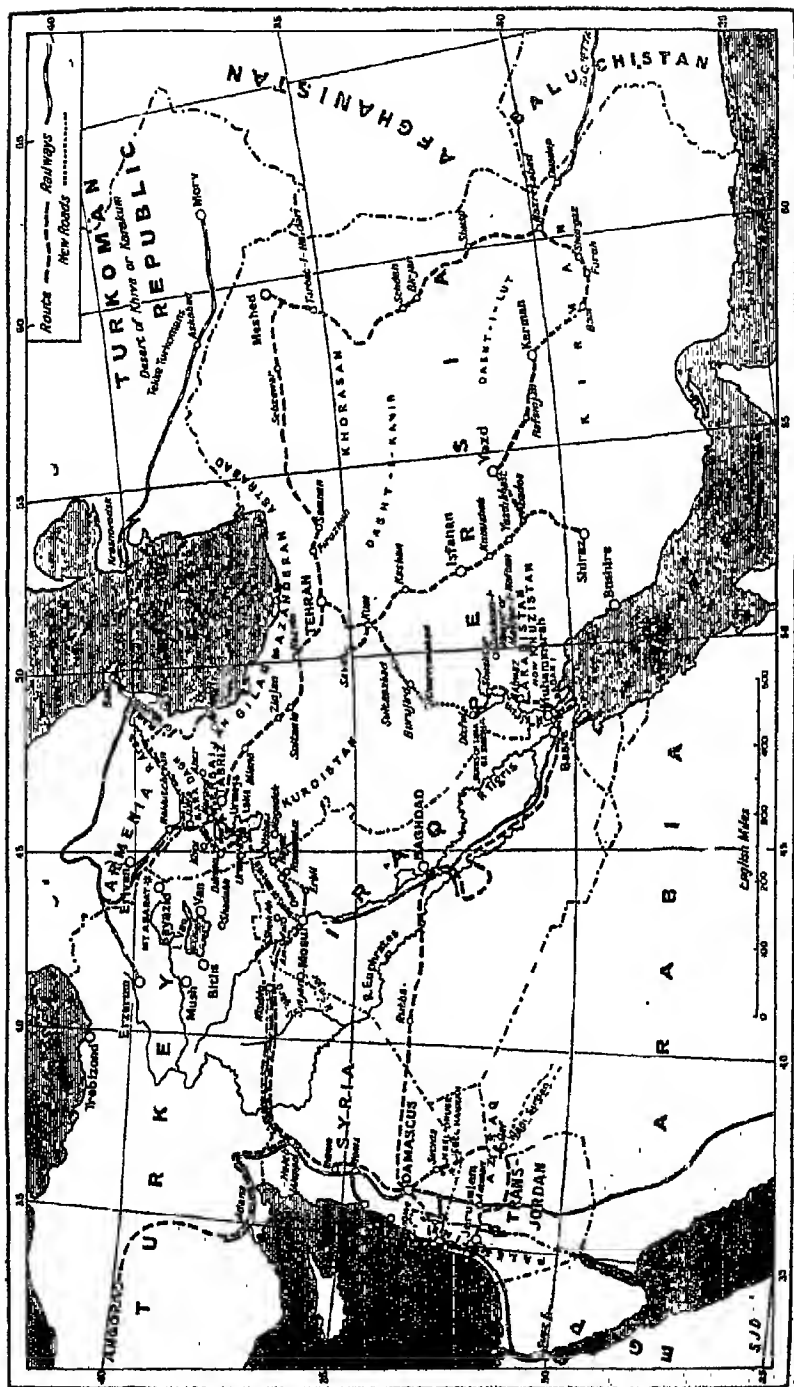
After this I no longer wondered at the driver's nerves. By the time we reached Abadeh, the little man was in a state of frenzy. He crashed on his brakes in the middle of a rubbish-heap and left us for the nearest hovel where he could get a pipe. The village was deserted. We could hardly distinguish the outline of the mushroom-domed houses. The Arab immediately proved his worth. With his help the Persian lady and I found refuge in the telegraph khané, where we were regaled with 'dogh' made of curdled sheep's milk.

Next day we were supposed to reach Shiraz by sunset, but it took some time to find the driver and more to rouse him from his poppy dreams. We jolted forth about 8 a.m., and since the overloaded truck had to be refreshed with water every half-hour and Jehu would have gone mad had he been refused his midday pipe, sunset found us no further than Persepolis.

The palaces of Darius and Xerxes loomed above the plain. In the hall of a hundred columns Alexander feasted his successful generals after the conquest of the known world. On the lowest step of the great double flight—below the porch with the winged bulls derived from Nineveh—which leads to the 'Great Kings' hall of audience, sat a dervish. With his knife he tried to open a soda-water bottle for me, and the result was a deep cut along his wrist. We all saw it. The blood dripped on to the bottle and stained the label. Then the dervish pressed his thumb along the cut and it disappeared. In its place there was a faint purple mark. "That is common work," said the Arab. "These men are holy and can control the flowing of their blood." Well, if it was a trick it was a good one, for the bottle was still smeared with red.

The first sight of Shiraz from the Teng Allahu Akbar Pass is supposed to elicit the exclamation "God is Great!" from the lips of the grateful traveller who, after three hundred and fifteen miles of desert, looks down on the gardens of the poets' city.

*"The Kaxvīnīs steal our hearts, the Tabrizīs have lips like sugar,  
Beautiful are the Isfahanīs, but I am the slave of Shiraz."*



MAP SHOWING ROSITA FORBES'S JOURNEYS IN PERSIA, IRAQ AND SYRIA

Sutton, Press & Co. Ltd. 47, St. James's St. S.W.1



Sadi and Hafiz, best loved of Persian philosophic poets, are buried, each in a garden court where, under pomegranates, cypress and orange trees, their admirers drink tea and smoke their water-pipes.

The Gencial Commanding in Shiraz received me as soon as I arrived. He talked for two hours in idiomatic French, concluding with, "My aim therefore is to eliminate British influence in the south and Russian in the north." "For three thousand years we have been lords of Persia," he said. "But during the last century, the Persian has been intimidated by foreigners. Only by encouraging a certain arrogance can we make him realize that he is the heir to a mighty past. Now we are in a half-way stage which is unpleasant, but it is necessary if the Persian, who is gentle by nature, is to be sure of himself. Civilization is different in every country. For us it must mean a hardening of the national character and a temporary isolation which will make us self-sufficient."

With four patched tyres and a double load, the only lorry-driver in Shiraz sufficiently optimistic to attempt the direct trans-desert route to Yezd, started on his hazardous enterprise. A pick-axe, a long-handled spade and approximately a quarter of a mile of rope were tied to the buffers, but the jack was broken. I discovered the damage when the first antediluvian tyre burst and we had to dig a hole in the road in order to change it. This took three hours. Consequently we spent the night in an exceedingly dirty village, where the headman welcomed me with the startling announcement—it being then about 11 p.m.—"It is a good morning. Bravo." These words he repeated at intervals while we picked our way across a yard encumbered with sleeping forms, human and animal, up a flight of two-foot steps and on to a roof where, amidst a litter of scarlet bedding, the favoured slept in close proximity. Persian hospitality is boundless, and I found myself sharing the mattress of a pale and beautiful woman with green eyes, presumably from the Caucasus, until sunrise cleared the roof. I was then presented with onions, goats' cheese and sheets of bread, washed down with excellent tea, before being speeded with the same—now apposite—sentence.

For several hours we bumped on a remarkably resistant axle down the main road. Then we turned east across a plain, cut by irrigation channels and low mud walls. Over and through these we plunged, sometimes pushed by amiable natives in blue robes and comfortable turbans. For miles we jolted down the centre of a dry river-bed, negotiating rocks with tank-like energy. New guides were necessary every few miles, and I was amused to see that these came armed, bargaining for payment in advance.

At Abarguh, a straggling village on the edge of the salt desert, we fortified ourselves with tea and filled our empty petrol-tins with water, for there are no wells in the next seventy miles.

"Keep to the left of the white rock," urged the onlookers, but as

soon as we were out of sight of the fort, a sand-storm whirled up like a column of London fog, and the mountains on the other side of the desert were blotted out. Camel skeletons marked the track, and a few, still reared on their hind legs, looked particularly grim as they loomed out of the storm.

"This is an evil road," explained the driver, as we lurched over the crackling red earth, coated with salt. "There is but one landmark between the ranges, and that is the ruin called Kaleh Khun (the fort of red blood), because robbers used to live there, but now the well is dry and it is deserted."

As suddenly as it had arrived, the storm gathered itself up and departed. All around us was crisp, salt-coated desert, hard on top and dangerously soft underneath. Just as I remarked that no white rock was in sight, the wheels slipped and we sank slowly on to one side.

It took us exactly five hours to unload the great bales of tea and candles, dig a trench under the sunken wheels, take them off, sink the more solid merchandise under the axles, lever up the lorry by slow inches on blocks of wood, replace the wheels and crawl out of the trench on the solid foundation of tea. By the time the operation was completed, it was 10 p.m. We slept for two hours and then began to reload. Fortunately there was a full moon, but, as usual, the driver and his assistant had brought no food, so I had to share my inadequate rations. Worse still, most of the water had been upset when we sank into the desert and the radiator demanded the rest.

By 4 a.m. we had pushed, hauled and levered the last bale into place. Crawling exhausted in front of them, we prepared to start. There was a slither of ungripping wheels, a jerk and a skid. Ten yards further on we heeled right over and sank once more into the salt. We looked at the wreckage and decided on sleep.

Fortunately at 8 a.m. half a dozen Khamsa tribesmen arrived with a couple of donkeys and a little water in long-necked clay jars. Breakfast consisted of the local bread which tastes of wood ash and sand. All day we worked to straighten the lorry, and by sunset our trenches were reminiscent of Flanders. The tribesmen helped and it was on their shoulders that the truck was finally lifted into position.

In spite of my impassioned protests, all the bales were replaced. Then—having poured our last water into the radiator—we started once more. But as soon as the tribesmen stopped pushing, we heeled over into the softest place we had yet found. This time the mudguards went out of sight and our volunteer helpers followed suit, saying that when they reached the next village, some thirty miles away, they would send 'an army' to help us.

Meanwhile it rained and we had no shelter, for the lorry was at an angle which prohibited entry, even had we been able once more to remove the load. Without food or drink, we lay down on the lee-side and the gale which succeeded the rain froze us till the sun rose,

Then we began to suffer. Without shade and without water, we spent the whole of that day—the fourth since leaving Shiraz—exposed to a hot wind in a temperature of 105 degrees Fahrenheit. By the end of the afternoon we were incapable of movement, and the only touch of humour, barring the mirage which offered distorted visions of lakes and moving objects that might mean help, was the notice branded on the candle-boxes, "These goods must be kept in a cool place."

Just before sunset, when I was so giddy that I could hardly see, the impossible happened. A car containing a party of merchants bound for Yezd halted beside us. These good Samaritans gave us sour milk and cheese—pilau we could not eat in our parched condition. Then, piling us somewhere among their water-pipes and other baggage, they drove us across the remaining desert. The only living thing we saw for fifty miles was a wolf standing over a skeleton which he had picked clean.

On we went into the mountains, where the track played leap-frog with all sorts of obstacles—ditches, mud-banks, soft sand and rocks.

"Look out," shouted the driver, "here comes the Father of Dust."

The merchants seized coats and 'abbas',<sup>1</sup> but, before they could put them on, we were enveloped in a shrieking whirl of sand which nearly tore the hood off the car. It was impossible to see or steer. The driver lost the way, but having jolted us into standing corn, he surmised the existence of a village. So—after stumbling blindly through the gale and into every kind of dirt—we found refuge about midnight in the caravanserai at Quhtal.

Here I was offered a choice between "a clean room with several most respectable men, one of them a Mullah", and the sole rights in a stable. I chose the latter, and after bargaining for a late start, "not one minute earlier than nine hours", I went to sleep on the floor. While it was still dark, someone shook my shoulder. "It is past nine. Why will you not wake?" repeated an exasperated voice. It was the driver, pointing to the waning stars and urging me not to keep "their honesties, the noted merchants", waiting.

Then I remembered that the Persian counts the hours from after sunset or sunrise, so that to my companions nine o'clock meant 4 a.m.

All the inhabitants of the caravanserai watched my dressing. They bid for places at the grilles which took the place of windows. But the morning offered no further adventures. Towards noon we left the red desert with its mountains so inclined that they look like wave after wave of receding breakers, and came to Yezd. There a large proportion of the inhabitants are Zoroastrians.

The women are unveiled and remarkably intelligent. The older ones have shrewd, amusing faces. Their speech is decisive and full of humour. They wear a striped red-and-brown or red-and-purple robe over dark trousers, with a surcoat of some brilliant colour reaching

<sup>1</sup> Cloaks of camel or goats' hair.

to the knees. Their unpainted faces are framed in a wimple of patterned red surmounted by a rolled crimson turban, one end hanging down the back.

At first sight Yezd has the appearance of a crowded factory site, for its flat roofs are dominated by scores of what might be chimneys. These are the famous *Badgirs*—wind-towers. Each house has one, so that the inhabitants may be cool on the hottest days. The towers are narrow and slatted on all four sides. They rise straight out of an inner room, with a tank sunk in the middle of the paved floor, so that a current of wind is induced and driven down on to the heads of the smokers or tea-drinkers clustered round the water.

Beyond the walls of Yezd, on the first dark breakers of rock, are the Towers of Silence wherein the Zoroastrians expose their dead. Above them hover expectant vultures and below are the domed 'Houses of the Dead', each belonging to a separate village, where the mourners light the eternal fire and the priests of a three-thousand-year-old religion chant their litanies in *Zend*.

At Yezd I stayed in the hospitable house of the Khan Bahadur *Abrul Qassem Moani*, chief of the merchants. By him I was introduced to many Zoroastrians, one of whom, *Khoda Yar* (Friend of God), took me to see the fire temples. Here in an inner room, sometimes behind a grille, smokeless fire, fed with sandalwood and aromatic herbs, burns night and day on a tall tripod. It is tended by priests who are supposed to wear white and who veil the lower part of their faces with a white scarf so that the purity of the fire may not be contaminated by breath.

By his ancient law, the Zoroastrian is not allowed to smoke or to blow upon any flame, but it is inexact to call him a fire-worshipper, for he uses the flame as a symbol, as the Christians do the cross, or Moslems the black stone in the *Ka-aba* at Mecca. He believes in one God, called *Ormuzd*, and in an Evil Spirit, *Ahriman*, between which principles of good and evil there is eternal war. Man can enlist on either side he chooses, and according to his deserts he reaches heaven or hell, but these are states or conditions of thought rather than places, and there is no reincarnation of the body.

With the help of the Khan Bahadur I secured a seat on a lorry laden with *asafoetida* for India. The smell was almost suffocating, but, fortunately—lest the cargo should ferment—we left Yezd after the worst heat of the day was over.

In starlight the desert became mysterious. A caravanserai, where we stopped to eat bread, eggs and onions, acquired the aspect of a stage castle.

We spent what the drivers optimistically referred to as "the night"—four hours in the middle of it—at *Rafsinjan*. It was 2 a.m. when we arrived, and the labyrinthine alleys between towering mud walls were deserted. *Muharram*, the month of mourning, was approaching

and black draperies fluttered from the hands of Fatima, which the Faithful had suspended above their portals.

I had a letter from the Khan Bahadur to a Hadji,<sup>1</sup> whose courtesy was proof against being roused in the middle of the night by thundering blows on his door. When the small boy who had materialized out of a dust heap in order to guide me, had shrieked an explanation of my presence, Blue-Beard himself unbarred the entrance. A vast figure, rendered prodigious by the amount of trousers, beard and turban which loosely draped it, led me into a courtyard, where a row of bolsters neatly arranged under a portico turned out to be the family asleep. A woman roused herself to spread another carpet. When I asked for water, she lifted a portion of paving-stone which acted as a plug. Thereupon a spring bubbled out, obviously suggesting a bath—but Blue-Beard watched, so—unwashed—I joined the prostrate family.

By sunrise these human bolsters must have dispersed, for when I woke, it was to find the courtyard clear of bedding and a quantity of women regarding me with expectant interest. Before I had shaken myself into the realization of another day, the Hadji summoned me to breakfast on cheese, eggs, honey and a sour junket called *mast*. After this—as I could not accept his generous invitation to stay “for a week, or a month, or as long as Allah willed”—he replaced me on the lorry with a handkerchief full of ‘smiling’ pistachio nuts.

Rafsinjan is famous for its pistachios, and the best are cracked at the side so that the kernel smiles through the rind.

Off we went to Kerman, where the domed roofs look as if they have been blown out of a bowl of soap bubbles. The town is tucked away under one of the usual reddish-black ranges, barren beyond description. The hills have the quality of arrested breakers, like those near Yezd. They hurl themselves out of the desert one after another, each peak leaning against the next. Within the walls of the privileged, there is the precious green of gardens. Pylons of white roses attract the nightingales. The air in Persia is so thin and clear that all colours acquire an exaggerated significance. Nowhere is this phenomenon more apparent than in Kerman.

I sat on the roof of the *Madrassah Ibrahim Khan* with a Zoroastrian who had been educated in Europe, and watched the miracle of sunset behind the domes of *Kuba-i-Sebj*. A few wind-towers stood up above the bubble roofs, and outside the town some curious conical ice-houses reminded me of Egyptian pyramids.

Not far away, a crowd of women gathered on a flat roof to listen to the story of *Husayn*. The Imam who recited it stood among his fellow men in the court below. The massed black and white of the listening women hung over the parapet, motionless and deeply moved. Beside me, the Zoroastrian shrugged impatient shoulders. “All that

<sup>1</sup> One who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

has no place in the new Persia," he said. "How can we compete with Europe if we are hampered by such superstitions?"

I left Kerman on a carpet lorry, driven by a young Englishman from the Standard Carpet factory. He was the only man I could persuade to attempt a crossing of the dreaded Shurgaz at that time of year, when it is always in a 'bad mood'. In winter this shallow depression is a torrent, but when I saw it the sands were soft and sullen as storm-clouds. To cross the worst two hundred miles of desert, between Bam—where we spent a night in a tea-house—and Dusdap, trading lorries are allowed ten days by contract before they lose the extra pay for 'express service'. But nobody bothers to enquire about them until three or four weeks have elapsed. We heard of some Persian women left with a dozen tins of water, axle deep in the sand, while the driver went for help. Returning with it, after undue delay, he met a camel-postman who happily informed him, "All your passengers are dead and two of them are mad."

Mr. Ward and I crossed the Shurgaz depression by means of strips of coarse matting, twenty feet long, so arranged that they could not be thrown out by racing wheels as is always the case with sacks. It was slow work, but fortunately a dune which usually lies across the track had been blown away by a recent storm. So after ten hours in the river-bed we crawled on to harder ground. Spades and matting were packed away. Under one of Nadir Shah's watch-towers, now a mass of fallen bricks, we put up our camp-beds and made a fire to discourage the jackals. A Baluchi on a trotting camel passed us, covering—he said—a hundred miles in the twenty-four hours. But in Persia what we call Friday night begins after sunset on Thursday, so it is difficult to calculate time. A solitary locust shared my pillow.

Next morning we reached Gurg,<sup>1</sup> where a road-guard had killed a man who, while cleaning a rifle, had accidentally shot his brother. The avenger walked into the post and announced what he had done, with the further information, "I am now going out to kill another of the same family. My brother's life is worth two others." Asked why he had not arrested the offender, the remaining road-guard remarked, "Why should I? He was within his right."

Dusdap, which means 'Thieves' water', is now called Zeitan. A new railway connects it with Quetta in India. It is the starting-point for a major supply line to Russia. Hosts of trucks crawl over a new highway created within the last few years by an army of workers—Hindus, Baluchis, Turkomans, Persians and Armenians—bound for Meshed and the legendary 'golden road'. From this holiest city of Persia, its golden mosque forbidden to infidels, they go north to Askabad, where Polish divisions rallied after leaving Russia. They were clothed and armed from India.

I travelled from Dusdap to Meshed with three lorries, loaded to

<sup>1</sup> Gurg = wolves.

double their capacity. On top of the carpet bales were piled hundreds of pilgrims. Men, women and children were so closely and inextricably wedged that the lorries might well have represented the removal of remains after some Asiatic slaughter. All sorts of heads, arms and legs hung or waved from the sides. It was impossible to distinguish their owners in the uncomplaining welter of humanity, fortified against any amount of physical misery by a vision of the golden dome of Imam Reza.

I shared the driver's seat on the first lorry. He was an Armenian eunuch who considered his passengers savages, and who fortified himself against the fatigues of the journey by taking cocaine at frequent intervals. We left Dusdap at seven in the evening in order to cross a hundred miles of desert before sunrise. Malik Siah Kuh Sir, frontier of three countries—Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan—loomed above other less imposing hills. Here a dervish was miraculously saved from death by the revelation of water at its summit. From the shrine built below the dark mountain which bears his name, issued one of the same order, his staff bound with fluttering rags. The superstitious pilgrims paid toll to avoid misfortune, but, in spite of this, the lamps failed, the connexion broken by continual jolting, and after mending them twice, the driver of the first lorry announced himself exhausted. Without further words, he flung himself face downwards on the desert. Covered by a piece of carpet, he went to sleep.

It was then 3 a.m. and most of the pilgrims were too stiff to move. Like bunches of locusts, they remained entangled on the bales of piece-goods. But one polite little Kermani dropped down beside me and proffered consolation in the form of an opium-pipe. "It is the only way we shall endure the journey," he said, fanning fragments of charcoal into a glow. A pellet was rolled and balanced above the hole in the china bowl. It was cold. Neither bedding nor food could be retrieved from the serrated human and vegetable masses behind me, so after half an hour I accepted the Kermani's offer. The effect was not so stimulating as I had hoped, but a great calm enveloped me, and when the dawn came I was able to argue the Armenian into action.

By 5.30 a.m. we were on our way again. Three hours later, a tea-khané appeared as a welcome relief to the desert, which was as usual neatly tucked between the feet of sudden, far-off ranges. The place was only a mud hovel, surrounded by piles of dirty quilts. From these—presently—emerged the host and some muleteers whose beasts had strayed out of sight. Tea was made with the salt water common to the Persian desert, but the pilgrims descended in a horde to drink it until the supply gave out. It is the tea habit which reduces the average progress of lorries to eight or nine miles an hour. As the drivers never go to sleep if they can help it, driving red-eyed and half demented by exhaustion for anything up to seventy-two hours on end,

they insist on stopping at every tea-khané to relieve a thirst engendered by opium or cocaine. The host smiles darkly above a row of urns simmering on a clay stove. "Seat yourselves here, for we have everything your honesties require," he says. "Well, can we have bread and eggs?" "I have neither of those to-day, but everything you need"—which in the end means lukewarm tea.

That day was a nightmare. The overloaded lorries averaged barely seven miles an hour and everything possible was shaken from its place, beginning with a Delco and ending with something essential in a dynamo. All the tyres burst. By evening, our lorry was crawling at two miles an hour with three covers stuffed with sacking and desert scrub, which went on fire at intervals from the friction. At the next stop, a boy on a donkey, who was making considerably better pace, stared at the gaping tyre for ten minutes before remarking, "It is broken." The driver, hitherto stupefied by lack of sleep, found his voice and a most unusual sarcasm. "Not at all. A bird has built a nest in it and I am looking for eggs."

Nothing better illustrates the careless optimism of the Persian than the way he starts on a three-day journey with insufficient oil, water, spares, benzene or food. One car asked us for matches three miles from its starting-point after we had been as many days on the road. To warm up a recalcitrant engine, the driver generally pours petrol over it and sets it alight. I heard of one chauffeur who, half frozen in the passes of Seistan, started a fire with his spare tubes. The village 'hammam' is always called upon to supply hot water for the radiator. It is so dirty that it clogs the pipes and the aroma is reminiscent of a battle-field.

In the middle of the night we laboured into Birjand, the engines making a cacophony of such unusual sounds that I thought it would be the end of the journey. The pilgrims, temporarily released from durance among the bales, heaped themselves around the lorries in the middle of what appeared to be a sandy square. With the polite Kermani, who for some unknown reason talked Arabic, I set forth in search of lodging. Eventually, we roused an amiable Indian. In pyjamas and a Russian sheep-skin, he led us through blind-walled by-ways to the house of an official. There for three blessed hours I lay flat on something a little less hard than the front seat of a two-ton truck.

In the green of the false dawn we started off again, leaving Birjand, its soap-bubble roofs heaped one above the other against the usual background of stark hills. Everybody said we must hurry or we should not reach Meshed the following day, but we wasted a couple of hours at Sehdeh, on the borders of Seistan. There the pilgrims, famished into revolt, pillaged the village with the thoroughness of locusts. In the dirtiest tea-khané I had yet encountered, I shared a bowl of 'mast'

<sup>1</sup> Public bath.



with a bearded Indian, who used the end of his pugaree as a handkerchief.

A Baluchi engaged me in conversation. "The Scistanis like the English, as we do." He said, "When will there be more war? That was a good time. Every man had plenty of money to spend and bullets to play with. We had never been so rich before and now we are poor again. I have but one shirt and it is patched."

"Not so well as thou thinkest!" retorted another voice. There was laughter among the pilgrims. It looked—for a moment—as if murder would follow.

During the third night, the drivers fell asleep at regular intervals. Fortunately, we were in the middle of one of those plains or deserts, seventy miles in extent, which, at different levels, separate the ranges. When the Armenian eunuch's head dropped on to the wheel, I kicked him gently till he flung back a mop of wild black hair and repeated parrot-wise, "What are you doing? I am not in the least tired. I am never tired. I drive a post lorry for a hundred hours without stopping"—by which time, having mislaid his cocaine, he was generally asleep again.

After four days and nights of such happenings and such conversations, we came to a pass from which Meshed could be seen. The pilgrims had already worked themselves to a frenzy by yelling, "Ya Ali! Ya Husayn!" The women wept and the men tore their hair or their flesh. The more temperamental beat themselves with the sharpest instruments they could lay hands on, and as they heeded not the direction of their blows, the lorries were in an uproar.

Fortunately, the road was so rough and the gradients of the sharp, right-angle turns so acute as we climbed the guardian range of Meshed, that the attention of the pilgrims was somewhat diverted. At each corner where the lorries were forced to back, we shed a few passengers. But these rapidly picked themselves up and ran after us with stones to put under the wheels—a necessary precaution in view of the narrow and precipitate track, the protest of overheated brakes and radiators, and the overloading of the trucks till they had the appearance of leaning skyscrapers.

A storm alternatively spat dust or rain at us out of a whirlpool of conflicting winds. But the pilgrims raced into the gloom, intent on saluting Imam Reza under his golden dome. On the top of a ridge, piles of stones, interspersed with votive rags, bore witness to the devotion of their predecessors. Having added to these the largest pieces of rock they could find, men and women beat their heads or their breasts, and flung themselves on the ground. In the middle of their lamentations, which rose in hoarse, hysterical screams, the gale threatened to blow them over the edge of the cliff. Shepherded unwillingly into the lorries by their spiritual guides, who had hitherto led the excitement, exhaustion laid hold of them. So it was in a comparative

calm, broken only by a muttered, "Zoh, Zoh, Ya Husayn!" that we laboured into Meshed. There the tents of mourning were already raised. The black carpets were spread. Black pennons fluttered in preparation for a week of spiritual sorrow, mitigated by sherbet, water-pipes and sweetmeats—not to speak of temporary marriages obligingly arranged for the physical delectation of the Faithful.

## CHAPTER XXX

1929

### *From Kurdistan to Ireland*

MESHED IS A HOLY CITY of the Shias because Imam Reza, eighth of the twelve Imams acknowledged by this branch of Islam, is buried here amidst the richest treasure of the Mohamedan world. Legend has it that he was murdered by means of a dish of poisoned grapes by order of the Khalif Mamun, son of the famous Haroun er Rashid who is buried under the same golden dome.

Apart from the miracles and mysteries of Imam Reza, the chief interest of Meshed is its position near the frontier of Russian Turkestan and Afghanistan. When I was there, it was the goal of refugees from Soviet Central Asia. Moslem nomads, struggling between fanaticism—encouraged by feudal interests—and the scientific partnership of agriculture and industry enforced by Moscow, strongly objected to collective farming. They disliked change. They did not particularly want prosperity. They preferred their own way. They could not have it in the new Russia. So they poured across the mountains—by way of the 'Golden Road' into Persia. With some of them, I travelled west. The primitive creaking wagons rolled along in Biblical fashion. Their great wheels sang a song of their own. Tea-pots and sheep-skin hats, furs and prayer-carpetts hung along the sides. I could not speak a word of the Turkoman farmers' language. An island of silence, I travelled upon a tide of speech. How much Central Asia, Persia, and Russia enjoy the gift of tongues! What a lot they must say, for they occupy themselves all day and most of the night, with the pleasure of saying it.

All journeys in the mountains and deserts of Asia are much alike. Indeed, it seems to me now that all my travels—whether in Africa, Arabia, Afghanistan, or South America—have borne a certain resemblance. Day after day, or month after month, I have driven or ridden across enormous spaces. The mountains evidently made less impression on me than the deserts. For summing up my life—between two wars—I remember most clearly a succession of plains, velvet green in the steppes, golden with grain, or leopard tawny with sand. Endlessly,

it seems to me, I journeyed across them—on camels, mules, donkeys or horses, sometimes even on bullock-back. Or—far less comfortable—I drove in every kind of vehicle from a tea-tray or a pill-box on wheels to a caterpillar truck. On the horizon there were hills. Sometimes there were mountains, with blazing blue-white glaciers. Always this high ground was our goal. Towards it we plodded or bumped. We were generally too hot or too cold. We were always tired and often hungry. Yet we were happy. I remember the deep satisfaction of the nights and the content when we had sufficient food or water. I remember the long, rich silences, during which I thought of God, and death and eternity, of love and work and fear—of sore backs, too, and blisters and aches. But these slipped into their right proportion. They were a background for my speculations on a scale to fit the emptiness through which we journeyed. I cannot understand how anyone can be an atheist who has travelled with primitive companions for any long period in the wilderness. For—wherever it may be—human beings beyond reach of ordinary help or sustenance, find themselves depending more and more on an outside force, immeasurable by temporal standards. It is interesting to watch the sophisticated unbeliever in a caravan succumb first to the fatalism, then to the fanaticism of the 'ignorant' and the wise.

In due time, I returned to Tehran—worn, aged and at peace. This time, I stayed at the British Legation with Sir Robert and Lady Clive. They had moved to their summer dwelling under the shadow of Mount Demavend. I remember delectable meals in a great tent pitched on the grass, a variety of fruits and flowers, moonlight picnics, and serious conversation with the German Minister, Count Schulenburg, who was afterwards appointed to Moscow. I thought him a shrewd man, but he could not—or did not trouble to—disguise the magnitude of German aims in Persia and elsewhere. Like Hitler, he believed "the Power which holds the oil of Central Asia holds also dominion over the next thousand years of history". Those years he intended should belong to his own country. Unwittingly perhaps, the Shah played into his hands. For H.M. wanted modern industries and a modern army. He wanted engineers and scientists. Suspicious as he was both of Russia and of Britain, he asked for all these—from Berlin.

From the august portals of the Legation, I stepped on to another crowded truck. Lady Clive said, "Don't forget to tell the F.O. I have not enough beds. In a fit of economy they have sent me only double ones—so unsuitable for this climate. You must make the Office of Works realize . . ." Sir Robert, amused and immaculate, interrupted, "Tell them in London what the Shah said to you about cancelling the contract for the air route to India. That is more important."

Meekly I agreed.

I hope Lady Clive got her beds. Sir Lionel Earle was most sympathetic. He agreed that irresponsible doubling might affect the inter-

national status quo. The Cabinet Minister to whom I confided the Shah's dangerous intentions, gave me an excellent lunch, said, "That's all very interesting," and changed the conversation.

After some days and the usual misadventures, I arrived in Tabriz. There I saw another flood of refugees from progress—and the Soviet Union. There were hundreds of them, the misfits of a new social system. They had swum the Aras river under the guns of General Bagirov. He was in the middle of his campaign against the farmers<sup>1</sup> who refused to give up the fruits of a lifetime of labour and to start again, on a level with the less thrifty and industrious villagers, in communal farms. What a problem Soviet Russia faced! She had to unite fifty-seven different races in a healthier and more reasonable partnership than Czarism had ever attempted. She had to educate a tenth of humanity scattered across a sixth of the earth's surface. Literacy under the Czars was, I believe, fractional. It is now almost universal.

Sitting on a bench or a packing-case in a garden at Tabriz, I listened to the tales of men and women still dazed by misfortune. Under the feathery peppers—or were they acacias?—shelters of every kind had been hurriedly constructed. Some were no more than a couple of quilts hanging over a branch. Hour after hour, in that tragic camp, I listened to peasants and artisans, to students, priests, farmers, lawyers, engineers and middle-men—the jetsam of Southern Russia. They represented the failures of a mechanical system which discards what it cannot use or does not need to use. These people were neither aristocrats nor intellectuals. A few of them belonged to the simplest middle class, earning small professional salaries in provincial towns. Most of them were of the people, illiterate and to a considerable extent unthinking. They had fled from what they did not understand. A priest impressed me by saying, "To-day there are three Russias. There is the ten-day tourist Russia, which you watch like a cinema performance. It is unrolled before the windows of a sight-seeing car—and it is deceptive like any artificial production. There is the sorrowful Russia personified by the refugees here—a mass of humanity unnecessarily broken and thrown away. Both these are temporary and immaterial. Behind and beyond these unimportant aspects of Russia, there is the real country, and in it a new conception of humanity. It is that which you ought to see—it is in the minds and the hands of a new generation." That was twelve years ago.

Soviet authorities should have been proud of the progress already made. But—obsessed by a persecution complex and as afraid of capitalist aggression as imaginative children of "Ghaisties and ghoulies and things which go bump in the night"—they closed their frontiers to unshepherded travellers. I would have liked to cross the Aras river and go home by way of Moscow. But I could not get a visa. I did

<sup>1</sup> The Kulaks.

not really expect it, for a magpie had sat upon the radiator of the truck in which I had travelled from Tehran. We could not get rid of it. I cannot free myself from the superstition that one lonely magpie is a warning of bad luck. It seems to me—probably without reason—that my worst failures have been heralded by black and white stripes flashing across my way. I do not like seeing a magpie, although I pretend to myself that I have grown out of such discomforts.

Preceded by the one earthquake which desolated the plain of Western Persia, I went south towards Kurdistan. At Urmeya, I spent a night in a house which had been cut in half. My room opened straight on to the road so I had a good view of my neighbours' sleeping arrangements. Camp-beds were pitched among the ruins, but most families felt safer on the ground. There they huddled, rolled in quilts among their cooking-pots. Troops were still using picks and shovels to dig out whole households which had been buried alive.

It was rather like London or the British ports in the bombing of 1940-41. For, on the plain of Urmeya, villages had been shaken together as if they were lottery tickets. The water-courses had burst. Bridges were crumpled and hung crooked. The road was split into thirty-feet fissures, and a graveyard, bursting open, had littered the surrounding fields with corpses. Big villages, where prosperous Nestorian farmers had owned large mud-built houses, with granary and stables on the ground floor and living-rooms above, looked as if the skies had opened and rained heterogeneous building material upon an unprepared world.

When I reached the considerable village of Selmas, the earth was still quivering. No one would sleep under a roof. As the shocks persisted, the people moved further into the open. They carried with them everything they could save from the ruins of their houses and were kept in a continual state of terror lest they should lose these last fragmentary possessions.

It was warmer than in the winter of 1940-41 in England, but the desolation of towns and villages reduced to rubble was comparable to the destruction inflicted by the first German air raids. Dust took the place of smoke. There were the same miracles—of rescue and of endurance.

From distraught Urmeya, I went into Turkish Azerbaijan to watch from the Kurdish villages on Mount Ararat war ravaging Kemal's new Republic. For Turks and Kurds were fighting to the death with only one possible issue.

The hero of Mount Ararat was a wild and gallant freebooter called Ibrahim Agha Hiske Tello. Instigator and leader of all the most daring raids, he seemed to me an altogether amazing personage, capable, apparently, of fighting—personally and simultaneously—on three different fronts.

As Sultan el Atrash was to the Druses, so was Tello to the frontier Kurds. His fame had already passed into song. Encouraged by his shouted name, women would take up the rifles dropped by the

wounded. Fighting side by side with their men, they seemed to enjoy the sport, for they returned to their villages, blood-stained and smiling, with the boast, "We are not afraid of our enemies. When we see them coming, we laugh, for how can an army reach us here?"

Their houses, stone-built, mud-faced out of the mountain-side, were plastered on almost invisible ledges, or within fissures which looked like shadows. It seemed then that unless the whole mountain were blown up, it would be impossible to dislodge its gallant defenders, but the Turks are as good fighters as the Kurds, whom they outnumbered ten to one. They were backed by every device of modern warfare, including planes, tanks and heavy artillery. The weight of metal poured into the mountain during the subsequent weeks was an earnest of Turkey's determination to 'finish with the accursed race'.

The front spread from Ararat to Bitlis.

In their hills the Kurdish tribes were fighting grimly, neither giving nor asking quarter. But in the plains, defenceless agriculturalists were massacred. According to the Armenians who sympathized with the Kurds and on occasions aided them to the best of their ability, many were deliberately drowned in Lake Van. Tales of atrocity bred in the mountains of Kurdistan. They grew with the wind and spread like a forest fire.

Some eight hundred families, unable to withstand the Kemalist advance, crossed the boundary into Persia, and added to the confusion on the plains already devastated by earthquakes, while the horrors on the Turkish side of the frontier were augmented early in July by the formation of bands of Kurdish terrorists. Their admitted objective was to strengthen the resistance of the nationalists between Erzerum and the Persian border, but their advent was a signal for the massacre of any Turkish peasants who had been foolish enough to linger near the front.

To counterbalance so much unnecessary cruelty, the heroism of the village leaders, to say nothing of the warriors on Mount Ararat, can only be characterized as sublime. Ignored by the whole civilized world, isolated from their fellow Kurds—towards the end, deprived of munitions and food—they fought doggedly and hopelessly for a freedom which was theirs long before they raided Xenophon and his retreating ten thousand. But from the beginning they were doomed. Like the Rif and like Jebel Druse, Mount Ararat succumbed to 'the forces of civilization'.

At Nagodeh I found the new road then building between Iraq and Persia. It now unites Mosul with Tehran, Tabriz and the frontier of Russian Armenia and is an important supply line to the Caucasus. But in 1937 some hundreds of miles were no more than an exciting project. My arrival at Nagodeh was expected, but I was a fortnight late. So the solitary Persian soldier guarding the track greeted me with, "Here have I been sitting on this mound for fourteen days and

three hours. It pleases me that you did not delay further, or the saddles would have worn into the backs of the horses which have so long awaited you."

At Nagodeh I hired a couple of stalwart mountain ponies and a guide. He wore a multiplicity of goat's hair garments, belted with twenty yards of sash. In this he hoarded all the necessities of his existence—tobacco, a couple of murderous knives, an odd coil of rope, a very dirty handkerchief with some coins tied in one corner, and a supply of local bread. The Persian Army supplied me with an excellent riding-horse and a charming companion in the person of Sergeant-Major Hussein Khan. Unfortunately we could not speak a word of each other's language.

We started in the middle of an afternoon with the optimistic intention of reaching the frontier post of Khané, thirty-two miles away, that same night. But we had reckoned without the baggage which strewn itself over the plain whenever the 'charvader' urged his animals out of a walk. Consequently, when we came to Galvan, a small Kurdish village set on a hummock in the plain, the sun was setting and we were glad to accept the headman's hospitality.

After a prolonged meal with the women of his household I was led through the dim mud streets, splashed with moonlight, thick with dust. Gone was modern Persia and the Pahlavi hat. On the flat roofs, a few mightily turbaned figures were engaged in the last of the day's five prayers. Goats spread round the houses like a thick, dark carpet. Boys, perched on the backs of dust-grey water-buffalo, sang odd little songs—like a thin wind in the reeds.

My camp bed had been erected in a hermetically-sealed hut. The Sergeant-Major would not leave me. My Persian was sufficient to acquire 'a large basin'—the family baking-tin—in which to wash, but quite inadequate to dislodge the self-appointed Cerberus. As soon as he saw me laid upon the camp-bed and already involved in warfare with a home-made mosquito-net, he stretched himself on a straw mat across the door. His sword he placed under his head and his revolver at full cock beside him. I hoped he would not have a nightmare.

It was not a peaceful night. By twelve o'clock the vocal duel between the village dogs and the jackals who defied them was at operatic pitch. A dust-storm scattered portions of the mud and thatched roof over our unprotected persons. At frequent intervals the troopers held what they imagined to be whispered conversation with the Sergeant-Major. Between whiles they sang in minor thirds. At 4 a.m. someone shook me and said it was after six.

So it went on until we reached the Iraq frontier and the projected road to Mosul. This became a fact in the Rowanduz gorge.

In the first hotel in Mosul I found—after six months of Persian caravanserais—I laid myself on a bed and asked for milk. I went on

<sup>1</sup> Muleteer.

asking for more all afternoon and well into the evening. Then I drank most of the water in the bathroom and felt a little better.

By that time it was August. The heat was intolerable. I felt like a sponge drying in the sun. Some official asked me to dinc, but I would not alter my recumbent position or leave the hotel while any milk remained. Next day I set off to visit the devil-worshipping Yezidis. As soon as it was light I started by car for Sheik Adi, their holy place among the wild hills towards the Syrian border. It provided me with an interesting series of contradictions. For crime is unknown among the devil-worshippers and sin very rare.

A few days later, I was with Sir George Clerk in Constantinople. I had telegraphed him asking if he could send me a pair of stockings to the Bosphorus. Otherwise I would have to appear bare-legged upon his august, red-carpeted stairs.

On the ferry, I met *The Times* correspondent, and he was very kind to me. It is difficult to impress any representative of the London *Times*, and above all one of its foreign correspondents. They are accustomed to wars, revolutions and earthquakes. But on this occasion, coming from Lake Van, bringing the first exact news of the Turkish-Kurdish struggle which ended on a row of gibbets at Angora, I succeeded in surprising an emissary of Printing House Square. "You've wiped our eyes this time," said the august young man. Never in all my life have I been so flattered. Even Sir George's disapproval of the unwashed archaeologist I had acquired somewhere in Anatolia, did not spoil my happiness. It lasted for days.

Such journeys were the vivid pattern of my life for many years. But the background which—as in grospoint—gave value to the design, was divided between the give and take of entertaining in London, country-house visits, and constant speaking all over Great Britain and much of the Continent. In the autumns we used to stay with Clare Cowley at Seagry, for speeches at Bath or Bristol, and with Sheila Westminster in the New Forest, so that I could lecture at Bournemouth. The Duke of Alba was often at Malwood.<sup>1</sup> Arthur and he used to play enthusiastic golf and I used to learn history from him. For apart from his difficult and valuable work—as Ambassador now of an important neutral country—he is one of the most learned men I have met. His only 'defect' is that he delves backward into dead centuries with such speed and acumen that one finds oneself translated—breathless—into 1500 B.C. while still thinking in terms of Metternich or Cavour.

The fellow guest I most enjoyed in Clare's treasure-house at Seagry, where the garden spreads each year like the samplers of earlier generations, was Lionel Buxton. For he knew so much about France. He is a banker, with a home in Paris and his finger—most delicately—upon the pulse of that amazing city which so extravagantly combined culture, charm, experience, ignorance and folly.

<sup>1</sup> Constance ('Sheila') Duchess of Westminster's house in Hampshire.



For shoots in the early autumn we used to stay with the Portals at Laverstoke. The house is quiet and white as Adams intended it to be. It has the loveliest staircase, fragile as our first hopes. The partridges knew their job and did it. Bags were record. It was very pleasant, lunching under the great trees, with Wyndham<sup>1</sup> twitting Mr. Herbert Morrison—maybe—or some other eminent politician, Labour or Conservative. It was also very agreeable walking about the park with Rosemary Portal, kindest of hostesses, raiding the beeches for the benefit of our London house which did not like flowers. It demanded great branches and masses of leaves turning red or brown. Flowers were smothered in it. Photographs would have been like pimples. I never had any.

I like to think of my friends as I last saw them, which means as they have always been, but the richer and more interesting for the years' experience. Sometimes we went to Ireland to stay at Kilkenny, which must be one of the largest inhabited castles in our continent. If a housemaid happened to omit anything on a breakfast tray, one never thought of asking her to fetch it, for by the time she had taken a brisk walk to the kitchen and back again, breakfast would be a thing of the past. It was at Kilkenny that I finished my book about Persia and Central Asia—with a sigh of relief. For that particular journey was indigestible. I had seen too much and could not take it all in. I felt as if I had been precipitated between yesterday and to-morrow with the force of a pendulum, gone mad. In my mind, when I could not sleep, I saw the communal colonies of Palestine as a pattern on which, under Soviet direction, the future might well be woven. I saw every small country, fiercely nationalist, developing its own industries as the Shah wanted to do in Persia—and the world's markets thus disturbed. They would be shaking like jelly, I thought, by the time every newly established dictatorship achieved commercial self-sufficiency, genuine or synthetic. In sharp contrast I saw the Yezidis, peacefully adoring a quite beneficent Satan, the Lurs worshipping Baal within sight of the biggest oil-fields in Asia and the heaped pilgrims bumping over Baluchi desert, destroying minds and bodies with opium on their way to visit 'God the all merciful and compassionate'. It was decidedly puzzling. The gold plate was a relief. There must have been a big party that year at Kilkenny, including some of the Stanleys and any number of Irish beauties with their attendant 'sportsmen'—husbands or otherwise—for the famous gold plate of the Ormondes blazed the length of the banquetting hall. At one end of it George's<sup>2</sup> eyebrows waved in the breeze. He says they get in the way when he shoots. At the other, Sybil Ossory looked smooth, shining-dark and mysterious—very brave she was, for she was nearly always in pain, from bones misplaced out hunting.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Portal, Minister of Works and Planning.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Ossory, now Lord Ormonde.

Clanderboye was another lovely Irish house where we stayed with three generations of the Dufferin family. It stands in the middle of a green park, rolling smooth and lush to Helen's Tower, whose legend I have forgotten. Its hall is filled with treasures brought from India by the Dufferin Viceroy. When we stayed at Clanderboye, his widow was the centre of every hour. She was, I think, the most remarkable old lady I have ever met—except perhaps the intransigent Maharanee of Baroda who should have been a man. I thought I recognized her courage and her scorn in Louis Bromfield's *The Rains Came*.

The famous Lady Dufferin seemed to me to be at least half the heroine in *All Passion Spent*—that excellent book of Victoria Sackville-West's which equals—in understanding and inevitability—her remarkable poem 'The Land'.

When Arthur and I were at Clanderboye, the day consisted of plans concerning 'Grannie'. The brilliant old lady played every kind of game with us, defeating her erudite nephew, Lord Carnock, with anything pertaining to pencils, paper and a time limit for thought. She was so much more than 'young' in spirit. That would be a poor word to describe her. For she was life itself—with its rare culmination of dignity, wit, gentleness, joy and grief. "Grannie would like it," said one delightful Blackwood girl, by that time Doris Gunston. "Grannie will come too," said another, Ursula Horne, whom we called 'Dormouse', because she was so engaging and amusing. Thus Lady Dufferin, the one-time Vicereine, dominated us in a quiet Irish house, dim with rain, sweet with flowers—and the strange perfumes of the gods and beasts standing in the hall—as she had 'dominated' with gentle grace, the great continent of India.

Another hostess, I remember, of completely different type—Sue Harrington, wild rider and madcap châtelaine of Elvaston. This is a castle, huge and rather grim, belonging to an outrageously good-looking young man, her son, Bill Harrington. Sue used to invite us and quite likely forget we were coming. A butler would regretfully explain that "Her ladyship had been called away" probably to some crazy adventure in a 'plane—bound, with her new husband, Luke Lillingstone, equally adventurous, upon a sudden impulse, for Czecho-Slovakia, without petrol or passports.

It did not matter. When Sue returned, she did not 'stoop to conquer'. Her friends gave in at sight of her. For she was indubitably beautiful. Years later we took her to a ball which the Italian Ambassador, Count Grandi, gave for the Prince of Wales. Edda Ciano was there, unpainted, enormous-eyed, sombre and curiously forlorn—in her black dress, unsmiling. All the duchesses who counted were there—many of them lovely, all of them splendidly crowned. I remember a group round the new Duchess of Gloucester, irresistibly charming. They were all in pale colours, slender, straight, speared and starred with diamonds. It was breath-taking as a picture. I thought of shin-

ing swords—so proud they were and splendid. But Sue Harrington was the most beautiful woman at that famous 'latter-day' ball. So many people interrupted my own dancing—with Bill Tuffnell—habitual partner of ten years who quarrelled with me, furiously and persistently, because I wanted him to marry Ursula Hohenlohe—to ask, "Who is the woman in white dancing with your husband?" that at last I answered crossly "Lady Harrington", before hearing the end of the sentence; or looking round to make sure. Edda Ciano was impressive because of the intensity with which she wanted things, but I don't think she was happy. Count Grandi—preposterously charming, doubtfully sincere—brought her to lunch with us. Unsmiling, the Duce's daughter talked of Germany. She had all her wits about her. She did not do things because they were right or necessary, but because she enjoyed them. So she approved of Germany, where she was received as a princess. She liked the ordered strength of the Reich and the power by which she was there surrounded. She was impatient with England. "You are all in pieces," she said, striving for words to express her feeling of political and social cross-purposes. Countess Ciano was forceful, ambitious, discontented, short-sighted. She wanted pleasure, and her character would not allow her to achieve so simple a goal. Arthur was sorry for her; I found her interesting.

So life went on between my journeys. All over England and Scotland, I travelled to speak. I stayed with mayors and professors and workers of all kinds, with factory managers and mill-owners. I 'inspected' and 'opened' and laid foundations—sometimes of surprising edifices. Once I opened a European hair-dressing exhibition in Manchester—with the help of the Lord Mayor and Council. From that I came away with so many aids to beauty that three policemen had their arms full.

In Ireland—South as well as North—I spoke about the Empire. In the Isle of Man, after such crossings as reduced me to a cobweb, I stayed with the Governor, then Sir Montagu Butler, and spoke to his wife's multiple organizations. I remember an exceedingly enterprising women's club which forcefully gathered all their husbands to hear me. "I don't know if they'll consider it a treat," said an outspoken and sensible dame, "but we think it'll be good for them." After this, H.E. solemnly congratulated me on "being good for husbands". He was—and no doubt still is—a delightful man.

1931

*The Last of Royal Spain. My Life Turns Round.  
Brazil. I Make a Friend in Uruguay*

IN THE SPRING OF 1931, Arthur and I motored through Spain on our way to Portugal. King Alfonso was in England, but the Queen had just returned to Madrid with her sister-in-law, Lady Carisbrooke. We went to see Irene at the Escorial. She was either just going to have an operation or recovering from one. I forget which. But we found her propped up in a big bed in an enormous room. A blanket hung over the lower part of the window to lessen the draught. I thought it was all very cheerless, but Irene Carisbrooke was indomitable as usual. She has courage, loyalty, charm and kindness of heart. She is also very elegant. It seems to me this is a rare combination of qualities. Shivering in the chill room, typical of so many palaces on wind-swept plateaux, Irene told us, "The danger of revolution is over. I am sure of it. You must tell everyone in England that the throne is safe. I wish you could have seen the reception the Queen got when we came back here. We heard the noise long before the train stopped and none of us knew what it meant. We leaned out of the window and strained our ears to listen to the crowds, but we could not tell if they were cheering or cursing." "It must have needed pluck to face them," said my husband, while I imagined the two women stepping out of the frail shelter of the train, heads high, smiling, to meet the roar which might mean acclamation or death. Irene went on trying to impress us with her own conviction that the crisis was past. The King, she said, was too popular to lose his throne over a political issue. The Guardia Civil were loyal. So was the Church and the country at large. Elections could safely be risked. The peasants would vote wholeheartedly for the King. Arthur and I were doubtful. We had seen a good deal of Spain. But in the Escorial, that spring day, one fortnight exactly before the throne collapsed, the whole of the royal family and the household in attendance were convinced the danger was over. I thought their ignorance terrifying.

We left the palace by the grand staircase and saw the changing of the Guard. The ceremony, I believe, was as old as the line of the Spanish Bourbons. In white cloaks, the halberdiers mounted the great white stairs. The Infantas were watching. It happened that they also wore white. The only colour I remember was in an ancient banner deeply red, which hung upon a wall. I asked Arthur if he thought it prophetic.

We had tea that day with Sir George Graham at the British Embassy. He was a bachelor, and his housekeeping was very good. So were his parties. He told us of one he had given specially for Queen Ena, and how beautiful she had looked in her diamonds and pale satin. He spoke in the past tense, with a finality we did not question. In Spain an era had come to an end.

We told Sir George of our conversations at the Escorial. He was much better informed than the royal family, isolated by tradition and habit of mind. "The situation is far more serious than they imagine," he said.

So I remember that visit to Madrid. It was for some days divided between the confidence of the Escorial and the justifiable doubts of our Ambassador. Then we motored on to Portugal, where the Lindleys<sup>1</sup> were on the verge of packing for another post. They are the most delightful family, but all I remember is walking round and round the small, high-perched, heavily scented garden at the British Embassy, talking of what must inevitably happen in Spain. The news that it had happened came on the day we drove to Cintra. In the palace of the exiled Braganzas, now a museum, among Queen Amelia's treasures, pathetically shabby, we meditated upon the fall of yet another throne. In Paris, a fortnight later, they could talk of nothing else. But there the disaster had been expected. Social London on the contrary was taken unawares.

At the end of 1931 Arthur and I went to South America, and the whole of my life turned round. Hitherto I had been chiefly interested in the Moslem lands of Africa and Central Asia. For ten years, I had been alarmed by Europe, delighted or dismayed by England, and enthralled by the extraordinary complexities of growth in the Arab world.

Then I met Lord D'Abernon, his fingers still inkstained, as it were, from his report on the lusty Southern Republics, heirs to Columbus. He talked to me a great deal about South America. So did that remarkable old man, the late Lord Faringdon, who created River Plate House, symbol of British enterprise throughout a Latin continent. It was he who really arranged what turned out to be a year's journey. This time Arthur played a definite part in it, for we were to be the guests of the British Railways and Land Development Companies in eight countries.

"I'll be glad to hear what you think of them," said Lord Faringdon to my husband. I remember we sat at a plush-covered table in a crowded, old-fashioned drawing-room in Arlington Street, while the shrewd old man to whom South America owes so much, handed over bundles of letters with advice and instructions. In that hour he made us free of a world I had never previously known.

Eighteen months later, Lord D'Abernon wrote in his preface to my book *Eight Republics in Search of a Future*, "Rosita Forbes is one of

<sup>1</sup> The British Ambassador to Portugal.

the acutest observers England possesses to-day. . . . I have been so impressed by her criticisms of social life in North America that I accept her views on the South American continent with considerable respect, and a strong inclination to accept them as correct. If they are correct, it is important that they should receive the widest publicity, for there is no part of the universe where English interests are more directly concerned than South America; none where a right understanding of the position has greater political and economic importance." He added that the year of our visit was *exceptional*, for it included no less than six revolutions. In this—as in all he wrote of South America—he was correct, but in the great republics as I saw them, revolutions took the place of elections in more democratic countries. They were generally the only way in which the people, or that section of the people which is either armed or vocal, can express an opinion. According to Napoleon, revolutions are "ideas which have found bayonets"; according to Siegfried, they are "a protest become irresistible against tyranny become intolerable". I should say South American revolutions are the final effect of bureaucracy upon individualism.

Fourteen years ago Russia provided the element of doubt throughout the feudal and Catholic republics strongly influenced by established custom, by the Church, and by the vast land-owning interests which controlled the food of the people. The situation, I think, has not changed very much. The South American republics must dislike Nazism for everything which its philosophy expresses—except the meticulous organization responsible for its original successes. But they are, as a whole, equally opposed to Communism.

South of Panama, in 1931, the Comintern, happily now dissolved, found itself possessed of five valuable weapons. Life was cheap. Peons used their knives as readily as laconic British workmen their favourite oaths. There was an exaggerated gap between rich and poor. It was the middle of the worst slump the continent had known, so unemployment was enormous. The Latin population were gamblers by temperament and training. A revolution, they felt, gave them as good a chance of wealth—or position—as the national lotteries. No republic could boast of reasonable homogeneity. Populations were in a state of flux. There were many different kinds of nationalism, but each nation was composed of vastly different races. Spaniards or Portuguese were the ruling caste, with Indians, negroes or half-castes as labourers. Between these two extremes were millions of Germans, Italians and Japanese, with big business or intensive agriculture in their hands, of British, Swedes, Jews, Dutch and Syrians, or Armenians, all with a stake in the land. British capital invested in the Argentine alone amounted to six hundred million sterling. More important was the talent and the work which these islands had put into the continent from Brazil to Patagonia. Within the boundaries of each republic we found an England—or a Scotland—consisting of thousands of young cattle-

men, coffeemen, railwaymen, sheep-farmers, grain and fruit experts, electrical and industrial engineers, road, bridge and factory builders, millers and sugar-refiners, shippers and merchants. Some of them were third generation settlers, part of the bone structure in the republics they served.

Before we left England, we heard a great deal about Rio. "Let us know what you think of it," said Lord Faringdon and some attendant Hendersons at Victoria Station. "There's nothing in the world like Rio," said the Captain of the Royal Mail liner, S.S. *Alcantara*—converted into a subsidiary cruiser for this war. "There is one thing more emotional than entering Rio harbour, but you will not know it till you leave!" This from Brazilians.

The Argentines were more guarded. "Evidently it is superb. You must not expect the same at Buenos Aires." They shrugged delicate shoulders as if Rio had overdone it.

On a day less hot than damp, we anchored off Bahia. Most of the sixty-three churches seemed to be visible. Palms broke out between the houses. The tiled roofs were pleasantly red and the negro population, rapidly increasing inland, had here overflowed the coast. The lower town could not hold it. In every kind of craft it spread upon the sea, until the harbour looked as if it suffered a plague of strange insects. But still Brazilians and Argentines, balanced on incredibly small feet, insisted, "Wait till you see Rio."

A sharp struggle with an innovation trunk which had hitherto accepted without protest more and more oddly assorted possessions, was interrupted by a steward, "We're just getting into Rio."

"They've got Rio on the brain," I thought, but I hurried up the companion.

It had been raining. Mist hung across the hills and the entrance to the harbour was conflict between clouds and granite peaks. A gigantic cone thrust through the vapour with the effect of an airship breaking from its mooring. Right and left the beaches were highly polished cycles laid against the sea. Beyond them was the forest, a forest which moved greedily towards the ocean. With the effortlessness of a tidal wave, it swept over the rocks. It pressed within reach of the breakers. It flung creepers over walls and roofs, slipping back across the land which, for centuries, had belonged to it. It fought with the city and was repulsed, but it clambered up the mountains and crowded to the ends of the streets. It gripped the harbour and spread, smooth, secret and inviolate, over the surrounding land.

As we steamed through the entrance, the Pao d'Asucar sank into the mist and ahead of us mountains were confused with great cumulus clouds. Below them an expanse of water was suddenly reft from the storm. The further range had disappeared, but the serrated peaks, known as The Fingers of God, were intermittently visible. Between grey clouds and grey water the town climbed into skyscrapers.





Then the wind began to play housemaid to the mist. A peak rose in mid-heaven. It was Corcovada. Still higher, so that we leaned back to look at it, a figure appeared. At first it seemed to have wings, but as the clouds fell, these became the arms of the Christus Redentor,<sup>1</sup> which dominates the incomparable capital.

Of course we adored Rio. Guinles, Bettancourts and Chateaubriands entertained us in wonderful houses and drove us through still more remarkable forests. These stretched familiarly between the last, strayed houses of Rio, laying huge, exuberant flowers upon lawns that were a part of Eden. The beauty of Brazil is overwhelming. The women and the trees are equally lovely. They have the same dignity. In Rio, we found a spacious magnificence of living which received us with unbounded hospitality. We went to parties. We danced. We met enchanting people. We were pursued by reporters. In despair I left Arthur to deal with them—otherwise I should never have gone to bed at all. And I like bed—eight hours of it every night, even if it is a desert or a mountain-side.

Brazil seemed to me like the Book of Genesis. In the beginning there was forest. On succeeding days, gamblers who dreamed in millions said, "Let there be cocoa, rubber, coffee, cattle." The red earth responded with a prodigality that shook the scheme of creation. There followed a succession of slumps.

We did not see the real Brazil, vast as primeval conception of life, till we travelled up country to the coffee plantations and the cattle lands. I remember staying on a 'fazenda' near Campinas. We arrived at sunset and the colours of a peculiarly dramatic sky were reflected in the garden. Flamboyant trees spread their orange-flowered umbrellas over the gate. Bamboos were so ridiculously like ostrich feathers that I had a vision of gigantic green birds with their heads buried in the sand, so that their tails were tilted skywards. Bougainvillea poured over the fence and clung to the veranda where right of way was disputed by a creeper with vast golden bells. The oleanders were prim white stars, and cactuses, insensitive as the fingers of fate, stood beside a fountain. The borders were heaped with flowers, their colours dimmed by the dusk as patches in an old quilt. Glow-worms burned on the grass and toads were discussing something momentous under a riotous crimson plant which the Brazilians call just 'foliage'. The bungalow was as modern as the heart of America could desire. It had a superfluity of bathrooms. Taps blossomed as on the thirtieth floor of the newest skyscraper, but the shower attracted a regiment of horned beetles, moths the size of birds and frogs with suction-pads for feet. It was disconcerting to see them hanging inverted, their padded feet adhering to wall or ceiling. The nicest visitor was a toad the size of a saucepan. He sat on the floor and ate beetles. When I picked him up, he talked hoarsely like an old man who has taken snuff, and I

<sup>1</sup> A statue of reinforced concrete covered with mosaic, thirty-three metres in height.

could feel the insects moving about inside him, but the restlessness of his dinner did not disturb him at all.

We established ourselves on the veranda, and talked about coffee. A hailstorm of beetles dropped upon the floor. The toad brought a friend to deal with them. The hum of the cicalas was as insistent as New York traffic. The branches of the flamboyant trees flickered into a hundred separate flames. The Southern Cross hung above the ghostly spars of cactus. In the damp heat, scent and colour became curiously tangible, like an essence of sweet wax which could be moulded between the fingers. But we continued to talk about coffee, for Brazil as we knew it then was not created by the Indian or the Portuguese explorer, but by the gamblers in Chata and Mocha. Theirs is a fabulous story, in the course of which landowners found themselves the heirs of Croesus. Niggers bought motor-cars and native women who had always gone barefoot struggled into high-heeled shoes, because nobody knew how to spend the money which dripped off the coffee-trees.

It was an inexhaustible harvest. For years, cash really did grow, wherever the forest could be cleared. Then came the slump due to over-production.

The impression of being party to creation went westward with us.

At Cambuhy it had been said, "Let there be coffee." So for several days there were unnumbered miles of coffee, with cotton as an after-thought. But further west Providence had ordered, "Let there be cattle," and for succeeding days, until, in fact, we reached the Paraguay River, there was nothing but cattle.

We drove from one 'fazenda'<sup>1</sup> to another. If a steer did not like the sight of our car, he tucked his hind legs under him and with the action of a steeplechaser cleared a five-foot barbed-wire fence. Sugar-cane and coffee, rice, manioc and castor-oil provided an excuse for clusters of mud-and-thatch huts. The doors were always wide open. Pigs wandered in and out. Children of all colours kicked footballs with bare toes, or perched in rows on a fence, their tattered cotton garments hanging by one button or a piece of string. Generally the lower parts of their faces were buried in half-moons of water-melon.

Gentle Brazilians, armed with a couple of revolvers and a knife, ambled by with scarlet sheepskins across their saddles and a jingle of metal rings on their bridles. Once a small procession crossed from village to forest. It was a child's funeral. The coffin was scarcely two feet long. It was gaily painted and carried by little girls, bareheaded, wearing their brightest frocks. A crowd of children followed, carrying flowers. They were all dressed as if for a festa, their brown legs were reddened by the earth, and a boy who looked as if he had Norse blood in him went hand in hand with a curly-headed negro. There were no grown-ups with them.

<sup>1</sup> A big farm or country estate.

When the road was least bad, it plunged into the middle of cane and corn standing far above the hood, but nothing dismayed the car, which its driver addressed affectionately as "Comrade". Red mud tracks, with a belt of high grass between them, became twin streams, into which the wheels sank so that the axle raked the intervening hillock. Sometimes the bonnet was like the nose of an alligator in front of us and a fountain went up from each wheel, but our driver liked swamps. Drenched to the waist and covered with red mud, he beamed at us. "That makes fresh, no?"

The most surprising things happened when the track sank into a cleft tilted between slippery banks and strewn with fallen trunks or hummocks of clay. Then the car apparently grew legs like a centipede and scrambled sideways up the banks. At such moments, the driver generally smiled and said, "Good road, no?"

Extricating ourselves from too close communion with our luggage, we replied, "It's not a road at all!"

"But wherever one can pass, that is a road," said the Brazilian and trundled cheerfully across a bridge which contained more gaps than planks.

We reached Araçatuba on Christmas night. The trees bore a crop of black crows. Fire-flies stuck to the wind-screen and flashed light signals to their more cautious friends. The streets were brilliantly lit. They were crowded with elegant young women, particularly neat about the head and feet, and limber youths without hips or elbows, who flowed bonelessly along. The whole town had turned out for the 'festa'. Concertinas, violons (a variant of violin—I think it has fewer strings), horns, sanphonos<sup>1</sup> and flutes contributed to a sustained campaign of sound. The maxixe was danced with abandon wherever the floor of a café offered space. Tables crowded on to the pavement. Peons in vast felt hats, whips hanging from their wrists, strolled through the crowd of townsfolk washed and starched for the occasion. Balloon-like trousers, immeasurably modest, with pleats or ruchings down the sides, escorted short skirts and shingles. Every man was armed, and later, much later, it took nine stalwart friends to prevent Mario shooting José after an exchange of insults which degenerated into a reiteration of, "Be quiet"—"I am quiet"—"Be quiet—"I'm quieter than you!"

In Araçatuba we slept on straw mattresses smelling of the stable and more uncomfortable than any floor I've yet encountered, because every few inches they burst into spikes. We ate good food heaped together irrespective of its nature, so that at one moment the fork produced river shrimps embedded in polenta and at the next sucking-pig confused with pineapple and red pepper.

We left the town in company with four young men in four pairs of highly ornamental 'bombashis',<sup>2</sup> driving a two-year-old 'camarada'

<sup>1</sup> A kind of concertina.

<sup>2</sup> Voluminous pleated trousers.

which looked—and was—the veteran of many fights. Followed by an equally enterprising lorry, we plunged straight into forest. Occasionally we stopped to hack our way through fallen trees in which hornets had nested. Once or twice wheels had to be dug out of swamp, each car being supplied with hatchets, bill-hooks and a jack mounted on a block of wood. But for the most part, as it had rained heavily all night, we drove through mile after mile of stream bounded by an impressive solidity of undergrowth.

"D'you realize that on either side of this road is virgin 'matto'?" asked one of the young men, less clean than when he started, for the lorry had spurted black mud over everyone who tried to help it. "Nobody's put a foot into that jungle. It's as untrodden as Fawcett's ground."

I had already noticed that since we left the railway everybody spoke of Colonel Fawcett.

Leaning out of the 'camarada' the young man, who was known to the Brazilians as Boishinhó—'the little steer'—waved an arm at the track. "A few years ago, there was nothing here at all. The development is astonishing." He had two dimples, and a considerable amount of mud on his forehead. His hair was like good quality fur, and when he was not talking to officials with an unbelievably earnest expression, he looked like an expectant child, not quite certain if a particularly outrageous request was going to be refused. He wore portions of a white shirt, a sombrero with a peaked crown, a spotted handkerchief tied round his neck, patched 'bombashis', boots with more wrinkles than the best concertina and an armoury of weapons slung round his hips. He was called John—we never knew his surname—and he said he was an Aberdonian.

After several hours in the forest, the driver of the first car waved an arm to indicate caution and turned up the bank. It was covered with six-foot sword-grass. We thought it was a joke, until our Brazilian smiled all over his face. "Good road, yes," he said with enthusiasm, and took the bank as if it were a Leicestershire fence. The grass closed in above our heads, but there was a suggestion of a track. Along this, interrupted only by an armadillo hunt, we came to Aracangua.

This 'fazenda', on which a few thousand cattle were fattening, was one of a group in charge of the four young men who had given us a lead over the road from Araçatuba. The assistant was twenty, and the manager four years older. John, having graduated in cattle, had become a 'coffee-man', and no amount of argument could shake his conviction that it was the best business in Brazil. The book-keeper was an Englishman born on River Plate. He looked like a subaltern, rode like an Argentine horse-breaker and craved to be a scientist. Instead, he had a whole-time job with the figures of three estates. The first thing I heard in the morning was the click of a typewriter, generally followed by, "John, you're in the way. Can't you wake up?"

The manager, long and lean, would have made an excellent understudy for Gary Cooper. He was generally in earnest discussion with the railway over cattle-trains, with the 'impictaiios' over wages—when the reiteration of "I do not pay more" became the undercurrent of a monotonous morning—or with the dark-skinned, half-Indian 'capitas' over the distribution of steers.

Usually the assistant lived in a mud-and-thatch hut in the half-cleared forest, where he was able to wear his beloved 'chiripas' undisturbed by the disapproval of the other three, but Christmas had united the campmen and allowances were made for everyone's taste. Hats blossomed into young tea-trays and if the 'chiripas'—something between a thigh-length kilt and a baby's diaper—habitual in Matto Grosso, were felt to be a trifle exiguous, the manager's 'pereiras'—divided skirts of leather which could stand up by themselves—made up for any deficiencies.

At Aracangua the 'fazenda' house was built of mud, whitewashed and tiled. Palms and skeleton trees interrupted the long grass. They formed a convenient perch for vultures, but most of these birds clustered round the pig-yard where they thoughtfully relieved the animals of their fleas, while watching for signs of imminent mortality.

At any moment a horseman might come cantering through the grass, throw his reins on the ground and lope across to the railing in front of the house, where he usually lost his voice. If his shyness permitted, he would lean upon the inadequate bars and murmur a request into the nearest ear.

As everything on the 'fazenda' had to do with the sorting or loading or driving or branding or curing of steers, the mystery might well have been omitted, but it was in keeping with the dark, unsmiling expression habitual to peons even when they are 'showing off'.

One day, a very old man rode up to the fence which separated the house from the first paddock. His hair was grizzled wool and his eyes looked a long way over the hills. He said he was Jesus Christ, but the Lord had cheated him over an egg, so he had left heaven for a while. An engaging lunatic, he insisted on playing the horn and singing a sad little tune about a wandering gaucho.

The 'fazenda' was divided into cubicles, but as none of the walls reached the roof, there was a communal atmosphere about it, enhanced at Christmas-time by lack of beds. Having generously ceded his room and a washing-basin in which hordes of insects daily committed suicide, the manager slept in a hammock on the veranda. The strangest sounds indicated that his assistant was finding life and the floor hard, while John entrenched himself in the office, his head on a typewriter. "It's most convenient," he said, "I needn't get up to work."

The first night provided a stage storm. The rain came over the ridge like a drop curtain. We had just time to clear the veranda before

<sup>1</sup> Steward or bailiff; foreman.

the house was wrapped in water. It was not like ordinary rain. At one moment there was a clear landscape with steers moving among the grass. Thirty seconds later wind tore the sky into ribbons. There was a shriek of falling timber. We saw the great trees snapping as if they were matches. "Some day it'll lift the roof," said the assistant, who always looked as if he had just had a hot bath. His words were drowned in a solid sheet of water which was flung over the house, so that we seemed to be fathoms deep at sea. We sat, wrapped in cloaks and mackintoshes, with umbrellas over our heads, wishing the bare tiles above us had more *esprit de corps*. When the force of the storm abated, we went damply to bed. The rain dripped on my head most of the night, and from the sounds which drifted over the partition walls, I gathered that the only person who had passed a comfortable night was John. Wrapped in a scarlet poncho with a beatific smile on his face and his feet in the office files, he refused to wake, even when the German cook, affectionately known as 'Greta Garbo', walked over him to lay breakfast.

Arthur stayed for some time with these engaging young men, for he had had a bad fall and hurt a leg already damaged by smashes while hunting or playing polo. I went far west to Matto Grosso, breeding-ground of cattle, and to the diamond diggings beyond Campo Grande. On the Aquidana River I stayed in a desolate settlement, where everybody drank champagne because it was no more expensive than beer. The diggers lived in hovels made of branches and scrapped metal. It was squalid beyond description. In a café, open all night, I was shown dull yellowish-white crystals. They were carried in hollow reeds at the bottom of well-buttoned pockets. In the tea-coloured river, waifs and outlaws—of all ages, colours and races—dig, dredge and shake the gravel in trays or sieves. They gamble their dreary existence and their unpaid bills on the chance of finding a diamond. The discovery of a big stone is signalled up and down the river by pistol-fire. Each man sends on the news, emptying his revolver into the air, to the fury of green parakeets. As bullets cost fivepence each in Guarimpo—generic name for the diggings—fortunes are rarely made by the diggers. It is the buyers of all nationalities brooding over cups of coffee and rank cigars in Campo Grande who grow rich. Germany needs diamonds for cutting her precision instruments. At the beginning of the war, she adopted every expedient—bribery, theft, drugs and murder—to get them from Guarimpo. But when Brazil allied herself with the democracies, illicit dealing in diamonds came to an end.

When I returned from the immeasurable West, Arthur's knee was a little better. It had been vigorously and diversely treated by the four young men. They were all highly satisfied with my husband and reluctant to part from him. I suspected long night sessions exchanging tales. With heartfelt and remarkable advice, they put us on a train.

Later we transferred ourselves to a boat. Eventually we arrived at Montevideo. The liner docked in the middle of the night and Hugh Grindley came on board to meet us.

So it happened that in the Rio Plate, on a brilliant, starlit night, surrounded by the tumult of South American disembarkation, I met the man who considerably influenced my life for several years. For Hugh was enthralled by South America and he could put his ideas into words. I must have been ready for a new purpose. And I needed a friend. For a long time I had not talked of the things which to me are important. From London to Constantinople, further still to Tehran, I had confined myself to facts. Consequently, life had become something of a prison. So much of me was pent within my own heart and spirit. It needed release. For eight years I had seen a great deal, without being able to give it proportion or balance. The ideals with which I had so impetuously started what I imagined would be a life of international service had been proved impractical. I had dreamed of 'federation' in Arabia. I had hoped for unity of purpose in Central Europe. I had striven to translate the needs of distraught countries—one to the other and all to Downing Street—without success. The idol of 'expediency' had been established upon the altars for which a generation died in 1914-18.

A good deal of me was broken by the time I arrived in South America. Hugh put it together again. It was a simple matter. He let me talk. He listened to my ideas and explained his own. That was all, except that he had read a great deal. So life for him was evolutionary rather than static. He was self-made, having earned his own living on railways in different countries. When I met him, he was a power in Uruguay and in the British industrial and agricultural system which did so much for the development of South America.

I have never met anyone else with whom I could talk so easily—or so much! It had never occurred to me that Englishmen of my generation could talk. They uttered words, stated facts, made love, gave excellent advice, described in full measure their sports or their politics. But none of these have anything to do with talk—as it is known to Latins and Slavs. For these happier and less successful races, talk is not only a way of exchanging thoughts, feelings, theories and conceptions, but a sharing of essential life. So also it seems to me—with my Spanish and Peruvian blood.

In 1932 I had grown up. No longer would I have been amazed and amused by Princess Potenziani's insistence that beauty must be shared. But beauty for me is a thing of the spirit. I longed to share, not only what I saw, but what I had learned, suffered, suspected, believed or doubted. My husband—by far the most attractive and delightful man I have ever met—does not approve of talk. He calls it "that analytical nonsense". Naturally he laughed at Hugh and me on the long journeys we made together. We bored him with our endless discus-

sions—of peoples, of possibilities, of life itself and worlds we divined but did not know. But even Arthur was impressed by South America. He agreed that it was a mixture of Genesis and Revelations, but it did not give him the endless stimulus which I felt. To me, South America was more than the writing of modern history. It was creation on a Biblical scale—and to this day I do not know whether the chapters written by the Incas or Columbus, by the mighty Liberators Bolivar and de Martino, by Karl Marx or Dr. Schacht, by such Englishmen as Lord Faringdon, or by Pan-Americanists like Presidents Roosevelt and Getulio Vargas are the most significant. But all this was the material out of which for four years I made—with Hugh Grindley—the most satisfactory friendship of my life.

No time was wasted. For as soon as we met—on my birthday, at about 3 a.m. in moonlight and mid-river—we established satisfactory contact. "What do you want to see?" asked Hugh. "Everything," said I. "That's all right," returned our host. "Is there a decent golf-course?" asked Arthur.

We stayed with the Grindleys in Montevideo and met the interesting President Tierra, who so successfully dealt with the illusions and the ambitions of his country divided between the extremes of feudalism and socialism, both devoutly or illogically Catholic. We also met the then Foreign Minister, Señor Artaga, and stayed on his estancia. But first I fell in love—with Montevideo. It is a delightful city, surrounded by smooth ivory beaches and the steel-blue of eucalyptus woods. It stretches gently to Carasco on the edge of the 'campo'. There I determined to live, between the tea-coloured river, the cotton-grass and the gum-trees—proud beggars with their tattered bark like worn brocade in palaces.

Before I could burden myself with a house—in the reckless way I have done at times from Africa to the Caribbean—we went up country. On a delightful estancia we were welcomed by a Uruguayan statesman-farmer equally familiar with cattle-breeding and international relationships. There Hugh and I—and our host—began talking in earnest. Fortunately in South America, nobody thinks of going to bed if there is anything else to do. Arthur was playing golf in Montevideo with a bank manager. So there I was—in unfenced country, made free of horses and speech. I asked nothing more of life.

It happened there was a plague of locusts. Every fence was upholstered with the large yellow insects. They looked like chenille fringe. A plague of them had eaten everything green. Nevertheless the 'campo' went to my head. It was so wide and clean and wind-swept. The shadows were transparent upon a lovely lion-like tawnness. We rode all day and well into the evening. Then somebody asked me if I had ever seen a carpincho. "No, what is it?"

"A cross between a hippopotamus and a guinea-pig," replied one of the young assistants.



"It barks like a dog and has webbed feet," said our hostess.

"We had a tame one which purred like a cat when its back was scratched," added somebody else.

"Is it a joke?" I asked.

"No," said Hugh Grindley. "I suppose it's really a water-hog. We'll go down to the river and show you one."

So we set off, in an old Ford, in the darkness, to look for these Noah's Ark animals. When one blundered up from the river and stood bewildered in the lights, I thought the night's improbability had reached its climax. For Uruguay is extremely unlikely—as well as utterly delightful. It is a cross between Karl Marx and Moab.

"Of course it isn't real. I told you so," I exclaimed when I saw the carpincho. Our host who was driving the car promptly gave chase. The blundering, woolly animal, its eyes and mouth straight out of a toy-shop, the rest of it monstrously misshapen, waddled into the river. There was a splash and a faint, absurd woof as of a mechanical dog protesting. Palms stuck out of the undergrowth like old-fashioned Victorian trimmings in a grandmotherly toque. "Bread-fruit trees would be much more suited to those animals," I said. "They are definitely impressionist. You have got your periods mixed." The *estanciero*<sup>1</sup> had not the least idea what I was talking about. Feeling it was up to him to carry on the conversation, he told me how red Herefords became sunburned.

## CHAPTER XXXII

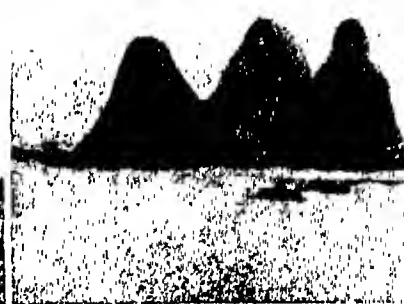
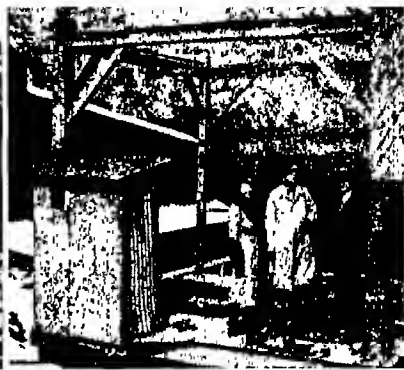
1932

### *Much of Argentina*

BUENOS AIRES belongs to men. They crowd the narrow pavements and congregate in groups at street corners. They loiter on the steps of clubs and public buildings. They fill the cafés, which are unusually silent, and impede the traffic with their haphazard wandering, for there is no hurry in the streets of Buenos Aires. The number of men who must be transported from one place to another justifies the unending procession of trams. Their needs have given birth to bars where faces are reduced to strips between hat-brims and the edges of apéritifs, to cinemas known as 'realistic', and to the so-called 'French houses', one on every block.

We had taken a night boat across the Rio Plate and were met by the press in force. For by this time the snowball of publicity had gathered size and weight. Brazil began it, Uruguay carried on with enthusiasm. Argentina, having no particular news at the moment, turned us into

<sup>1</sup> Estate owner.



1. Railway bicycle—with the Manager of the San Paolo-Santos line. 2. The McGraths at a mine in Chile. 3. Burning neneo bush, for a moment's warmth, in Patagonia. 4. The Sitt Khadija (Rosita Forbes) with her two slave women, in the Sahara. 5. Encounter in Costa Rica

#### ENDS OF THE EARTH





L.N.A.



1. Arthur and I at our wedding.
2. On the steps of our private coach, Argentina.
3. On the Lido.
4. After the flight to Antofagasta, Chile

"FOR BETTER" . . . HARDLY AT ALL . . . "FOR WORSE"



a public event. Whatever we did was chronicled. When we travelled, it was with the appurtenances of Prime Ministers or Hollywood stars. At all moments, we were asked what we thought of South America. This is a national game and a way of catching out the foreigner. It is known as 'l'esprit Criollo'. The first time I was invited to play was immediately after my arrival in Buenos Aires. My opponent was a young reporter, a townsman of course, witty and a trifle mocking, very quiet and adaptable, resentful of circumstances and always on the alert lest somebody should get the better of him. He had no bones. His hair was like the down on a newly-born chicken. Crumpled into a chair, with his legs at unnatural angles, he asked, "What d'you think of Argentina?"

"I haven't seen it yet."

"D'you mean to say you've been here a couple of hours and you don't know all about us? How surprising! You should have made up your mind on the boat. I've interviewed everyone——" He listed celebrities on his fingers, with a smile for the author of *Cavalcade*. For, if Keyserling made South America feel elemental and the Prince of Wales made it feel successful, if Paul Morand disturbed it by seeing niggers where there should be none, and Hoover played spillikins with its finances, Noel Coward kept it guessing and was therefore immensely popular. The reporter, who had a twinkle behind his spectacles, continued, "I talked to the whole bunch of them while they were breakfasting—with their backs to the view"—in itself a crime, for the view from the higher windows of the Plaza Hotel, where everyone stays, hopes to stay, or pretends to stay, is a synthesis of city magic, girt by the reality of River Plate. "Each of them—well, most of them—told me a lot about Argentina. There wasn't a thing they didn't know. They'd got it all planned. They told me just where we were wrong and how to put it right. Haven't you got any ideas at all?"

"Not about the Argentine," I said, and scored the first point, but during the rest of the conversation I was breathless. It went so fast I could not keep up with it. The young man, who was justly indignant because he had to invent opinions for me in order to dispute them, made such remarks as "Religion is the jailer of women", and "Half the world's got the habit of corruption. What have you against it? A negligible minority opinion." Argentines—it seemed to me—use speech as mask and foil combined. To strangers they say what they want them to think, what they imagine they ought to think, or what they are expected to think, instead of what they really do think. Buenos Aires itself represents what Argentina would like to be and what she hopes she may some day be, rather than what she is at the moment. For this reason the contrast is the more amazing between the metropolis and the plains on which a hundred million head of live stock are pastured and the Chaco where a half-Indian people live little better than animals.

In the capital there are intellectual rebels who pride themselves on an informality derived from the Quartier Latin. These writers, painters, students and theoretical revolutionaries whose work is the re-creation of South America, are inclined to admire only what has received the accolade of French approval. I thought they would rather win the Prix Goncourt than be read by a million South Americans. They work, therefore, for Paris and not for the Pampas. In Argentine literature the gaucho<sup>1</sup> has found interpreters, but there is no Sinclair Lewis or Edna Ferber, writing of ordinary people and everyday happenings, and read by those masses whose lives are made up of incidents which will never be events except in their own imagination. The South American Babbitts living on the main streets of country towns, in houses made of mud bricks, roofed with galvanized iron, leaning against the crooked pillars of their porches because it is too much trouble to stand upright, are occupied with the daily business of earning a bare living in a hard climate. It is they who are building up the Argentina which may one day justify the size, luxury, and sophistication of Buenos Aires, but they are not the type of criollo immortalized by contemporary literature. Their only link with the rapier-witted intellectuals of the capital is their habit of staying up late, their superficial exhaustion and the sorrows they express with a couple of fingers on a single-stringed violin.

Everybody was kind to us in Argentina. Uriburus, Anchorenas, Campo Urquisas, Carcanos, Martinez de Hoz—all the great families descended from imperial Spain entertained us on estancias where Schiaparelli and Henry Ford might have rubbed shoulders with Abraham. I remember being driven across pastures, unfenced and apparently without any boundaries but the horizon. Cattle in their usual thousands were grazing on ten times as many acres. The prospect and the figures it involved were so vast that they induced the same unease as astronomical calculations. But the appearance of the land was primitive and Biblical. The small mud-and-tin hovels, which swelled out of it like mushrooms, were not unlike the huts of nomad shepherds on the great plains of Central Asia. An extremely attractive girl, whose finger-nails matched her lips, drove me in an eight-cylindere Packard. I gathered that a dozen of the same cars waited in the family garage.

Trees broke the monotony of pasture. We turned into an avenue and suddenly, beyond a blaze of flowers and an effective array of statuary, there appeared a Tudor mansion. Its loggias might have come from Italy and its gates from Versailles. It was the centre of a model village, where retainers lived in picturesque luxury. The house, so perfect that its Tudor resembled the best American rather than the faulty Elizabethan of the English Middle Ages, had been built in little over a year. In the same period it had been furnished. Everything

<sup>1</sup> See Hernandez's *Martin Fierro*.

it contained was guaranteed by a famous European designer. A flock of Lalique birds decorated the dining-room. The bathrooms, blue, yellow, green and rose, were so lovely they could only be by Froy. The linen, coloured to match, came from the Czecho-Slovakian factory which alone can make a towel look like a flower garden. An international exhibition had provided the chairs, each of which belonged to history. The porcelain was signed by a unique ceramic artist in Madrid. All Europe, in fact, had contributed to a dwelling set in the middle of newly-sown grass which might just as well have been the oldest in the world, the Plain of Moab, where Abraham pastured his herds.

Yet the house drew its character from Argentine history. Its walls were hung with portraits of the men who created the republic. One of them had been murdered in front of his seventeen-year-old daughter, the owner of the new Tudor house. So I became conscious of another contrast. The expensive modernity of decoration and plumbing became less important than the old silver crucifixes which hung below the portraits of patriots and soldiers. For hereditary Argentina has contrived to combine tradition with a luxury that only the United States can equal. If it passes, this curious combination of dignity and display, of leisure and hard work—for undimensional estates entail a fourteen-hour day for estancieros as well as peons—it will mean the end of an interesting phase of life. It is one which could only have existed in a strong country, proud of its past and confident of its future, a country striving to impose what is best in modernity upon the antiquity it treasures and to which it is bound by its religious and social structure.

The new Argentina is already impinging upon the old. As in the United States, where every class is hurrying up the social and cultural ladder on the heels of the one ahead, so in Argentina, the settler, the colonist and the small farmer who is gradually increasing his acreage, are spreading over the plains once sacred to the million-acre estancia.

The law of inheritance is a sword suspended over the feudalism of South America. Each child, legitimate or otherwise, is obliged to inherit a share of the parental property. Consequently, estates which have survived three generations of extravagance are gradually being sold to small settlers.

For a little while the leisure, grace and dignity of incomparable Argentina may endure with its beauty of sun and space, with the mystery of its forests and rivers. Then, I suppose, it will become what it is not yet—a Latin America, standardized by invention, spiritually limited by progress. Before that happens, I shall be dead. While I live, I can remember Argentina as the stuff whereof first our ambitions and then our dreams are made.

The four months we spent in the great republic were among the happiest in my life. We saw such beauty as I had never imagined. We

travelled some thousands of miles by every form of conveyance, from river steamer on the mighty Parana river to rafts in the Chaco swamps, from special trains on hospitable British railways to a bullock-cart crossing the Andes from Patagonia into Chile.

Hugh Grindley went with us to Iguasu, that miracle of waters on the frontier of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. Here the river sweeps in a vast curve through forest untrodden by any foot, brown or white, and crashes over a series of horseshoe cliffs separated by tiers of flowering trees. There is one place from where the full expanse of the falls can be seen. An indigo haze covers a thousand leagues of forest. Where the branches widen after their struggle through eighty feet of creeper and undergrowth, the effect is of trays heaped with blossom, scarlet, yellow and purple. Tree-trunks are silver stripes in the foreground.

Above the vast and rolling web of green, where the shape and pattern of the bamboos is changed by every gust of wind and one growth is imposed upon another, so that in the steamy depths it is always dark, there hangs a cloud of foam. Out of it springs a rainbow, and below it, where the river hurls itself into the gorge, the jungle is cleft into arches of crystal.

In the company of two Guaranis, a semi-Indian people who originate in Paraguay but who provide most of the labour on the rivers, we paddled into the rapids above the cataract known as 'The Devil's Throat'. It seemed to me a hazardous proceeding. There was a leak in the bottom of the boat, which we caulked with a strip of old canvas. After that we bailed. Our guides were so laden with arms—twenty-inch knives for cutting creepers, bill-hooks for undergrowth, revolvers in case we met a jaguar—that they had difficulty with the oars. The current caught us and swept us into a reef of bushes which hung perilously near the fall.

We poled out of them. Inch by inch, we swung across the whirlpool till, soaked and blinded by spray, we came to an outcrop of rock which had withstood centuries of erosion. To it clung coarse grass and a few bent trees. On either side of it rushed immeasurable weight of water, so that it seemed as if a world were moving past us. The noise deafened us and our feet slipped on the boulders. Space was obliterated and time lost. Hypnotized by the masses of falling water, we lay on the edge of a cliff and watched, fifty feet away, what seemed to be the force and sound of one hemisphere translated into another. I shall never forget that moment.

On the way back we paused, after prolonged conflict with the current, on an island which shook as if it were a craft insufficiently anchored. At any moment I felt it might break loose and be swept over the steel-smooth curve of the falls, but the Guaranis wanted tortoise eggs for supper. While they searched for spoor, butterflies the size of saucers drifted overhead, and a sticky yellow creeper tore

at us with thorns hidden under the treacherous smoothness of its leaves.

The Guaranis found soft earth and began digging. A few inches underground were clutches of eggs like opaque glass balls, round, hard-shelled and white. There were twenty in one hole and sixteen in another. The guide said they would make an excellent omelette, and he refused to be sorry for the tortoise. He assured us that she had no maternal instincts.

Twelve hundred miles north of Buenos Aires we stayed on an English sugar estate.

Fifty years ago, when the province was covered with virgin forest, the first English sugar-mill (from Fawcett Preston of Liverpool) was brought up in bullock-carts, behind teams of twelve and twenty. There were no roads. The rivers were often flooded. With bill-hooks and axes the pioneers cut their way through the jungle. At night they had to make a zareba of the carts, inside which, with sentinels posted and rifles ready, they could beat off the Indians' attack. The great wheel of the mill weighed three tons. Under it the carts sank into swamps and progress was often limited to two hundred yards a day.

Under the Andene peaks, snow-crowned through a torrid summer, there are now a million acres cleared from the forest. Beyond and all around stretches the impenetrable jungle, the Green Hell of the Chaco. It breeds tarantulas the size of kittens, and a cactus with a sensitive branch, which, according to the Indians, stretches out like the tentacle of an octopus to catch and crush the unwary.

Into this dark world, lit by the flames of a thousand flowering trees, scarlet, orange and star-white, the Indians retire after the harvest. But for five or six months of the year, they work among the cane, and at Carnival, the week dedicated to their curious conception of the Christian god, they dance to the music of grand opera, relayed by wireless from Buenos Aires.

It is a world in which Alice-of-the-Looking-Glass would find herself at home. In spite of the temperature, which soars to a hundred and five or a hundred and ten degrees, the Indian women wear fifteen or twenty fluted red petticoats one on top of another. Their heavy black pigtails fall to their knees. They work hatless and barefoot, but in their bodices they carry strange amulets against still stranger ills. The men wear dark trousers and pyjama coats. Their Mongol features are accentuated by the cruelty of their sensual lips, but they are gay and amusing. The knives with which they cut and strip the cane are taken away from them before the week of Carnival. Otherwise the thirteen-inch blades would be sheathed in human flesh. In spite of this precaution, a village wastrel possessed of a roving eye showed us the scars of forty knife-wounds. Another had been slashed open in the course of an argument and sewn up so hurriedly by his wife that, as he expressed it, she "made tucks of tripe and flesh together".



When the Chiriguano Indians are courting, or willing to be courted, they paint circles of vermillion on their cheeks. They will not kill a horse except by hanging it on a lasso over the branch of a tree. They believe that a twin—any twin—can cure horse sickness, and indeed it is extraordinary the way an animal, in what appears to be the last frenzy of 'mad staggers', will quieten under the hands of an authentic twin. Hereditary in certain families is the power of curing festering wounds from the sight of a footprint or a hoof-mark. This is considered so reasonable that an English manager, with five thousand labourers under him and a score of clerks clicking their typewriters in his office, is likely to note the spoor of a sick animal, cover it with leaves and send for the wise man or woman who will immediately, without even seeing the sufferer, effect its cure.

The forest Indians build themselves tents of branches while they work in the cane and burn them when they leave, lest their spirits lingering in their old habitations should become subject to the next lodger.

They are paid under the watchful eyes of a Government inspector, and before returning to the Chaco they spend their earnings in the company store, which is stocked like a fair.

"You have so many pesos to spend," says the storekeeper. "What'll you have?"

"A horse,"<sup>1</sup> replies the Indian, who has already put his money on the counter.

His wife chooses a roll of brilliant material. Then there is a pause.

"What else?" asks the shopman.

"Some trousers."

"Very well. But you've still got fifteen pesos."

"I'll have a hat."

A wide-brimmed felt, stiff as metal, is handed over the counter.

"That leaves you ten pesos. What else d'you want?"

The pause becomes a sink, a pool, a swamp of silence. At last, "I'll have a hat," says the Indian. He puts the two, one on top of the other, on his head.

"Still five pesos to spend," says the storeman, and after aeons of exhausting thought, the Indian repeats, "Give me a hat."

He walks out proudly, balancing three tiers of headwear on the top of an ebony shingle, and a few hours later he probably exchanges a hat for a kilo of meat.

One day the butcher had twenty-five pairs of trousers in his shop. The forest Indians had worn their wages for a day or two and then tired of them.

A chief who was given a mule as a present, tried to exchange the animal in the next village for a quart of alcohol. Another, who had bought what must have been a remnant in horseflesh for fifteen shillings

<sup>1</sup> Costs between 3 dollars 50 cents and 17 dollars (U.S.A.).

and found it as inadequate as most other bargains, returned to ask the storeman if he could have a pair of rope-soled sandals in its stead.

Eddies of these people settle in the villages, mushroom-grown among the cane, in huts made of mud bricks or the rusty sides of kerosene oil tins, thatched with creepers or a crazy piece of galvanized iron. And in Carnival week, they swell the throng of mixed Spanish-Indian types, parading the grandly-named 'plaza', an irregular space of mud seamed with ruts and hoof-marks. 'Carnival-trees', burdened with candles of yellow flowers, shower their petals on the crowd. Booths are erected where the weary may suck bitter tea out of gourds, or eat oddly-shaped cakes sticky with sugar.

Beer flows. It does so literally, for every peon comes to the Carnival determined to dance till his legs fail him and to drink till he does not know whether he has a head or not. Of course, it is an orgy. Round and round, in the dust and in the mud, twirl the dancers, stepping solemnly in circles, always one man to two women, to the thread of a flute and the heart-rending stammer of hide drums, while a flood of Italian opera sweeps out of a loud-speaker, drowning the local rhythm. The cry of *La Tosca* as she flings herself off the battlements in the famous Colon Opera House at Buenos Aires, crosses twelve hundred miles of field and forest to echo startlingly over the crowd of sweating peons, bemused by drink and three days' repetition of the same movement.

We sat on our country-bred horses on the edge of the crowd and listened to the music from a capital which is more sophisticated than Paris, more formal than pre-war Vienna. The opera became, for no reason that we could understand, a famous band playing dance music at Armenonville, the Café de Paris of Buenos Aires. In another moment, I felt, we might hear a lecture on cattle-breeding, or the latest traveller, arrived that morning by the Royal Mail from Europe, giving his or her opinions on the great Argentine Republic. Neither of these eventualities would have affected the dark-skinned, excited audience. They were wound up for the third night of Carnival. If they slept at all, it would be where they fell, in the dust, in the mud, or dragged into a corner of the shed where their fellows, a little less unsteady on their feet, were betting on the fall of a bullock's knuckle-bone.

A woman whose magenta skirts were stained with wine, threw streamers of coloured paper. One caught my horse's ears and he plunged free of the crowd.

The manager had dismounted. An Indian caught him by the arm and poured half a bottle of beer over him, repeating, "We must drink together, patron—the god of fun, *como no?*"

Beer dripped over the edge of tin tankards. It made pools on the ground. More of it now was spilled than drunk, for every peon had come to Carnival determined to stay there until he had spent the last cent of his wages. He might have earned a hundred pesos by a month's

work in the gruelling sun, and all of it would go in three nights' pleasure.

"That's the limit we allow," said the manager. "We send them to bed on the fourth day and resume work next morning. It's too hard on the women and children—wages poured out in this mess. On Saturday, they'll all be asking for an advance."

A woman caught his sleeve and struggled to force a mug into his hand. He tried to free himself and she tore his stout shirting from shoulder to wrist. Cheap scent was squirted into my face. More serpentes startled our horses. A wild figure with tangled hair, his face smeared with chalk, a turquoise thrust into his lower lip, beat a hide drum, bound with withes. A husband drew a knife because a wife shared somebody else's bottle. And over all this madness, over the unsteady dancers who dared not stop for fear that heads and feet should give way together, over the dust-stained cars which are gradually taking the place of the sheepskin-saddled horses, over the taba players gambling their season's gains, dominating the local music, gathering this outlandish Carnival of tropical forest and the untrodden Andean snows into the fun and fashion of a capital city's boulevards, came now a tango. From Bucnos Aires it came, from the resplendent boulevards twelve hundred miles away. There for a week or an hour the courtly Argentines forget the sadness of the pampas which accompanies them to the towns and causes them to take their pleasures as seriously as the morals of their women, the pedigree of their stock and the prices echoing on the 'Changes of London and Chicago.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

1932

### *From Patagonia into Chile. Scot and German*

I SHALL NEVER KNOW what I liked best in Argentina, because I liked everything so much. It was great fun travelling in special coaches, their bathrooms as large as our war bedrooms to-day, with railway managers like Ronald Leslie, Oscar Lowenthal and Hugh Grindley, all of whom knew the country as if it were the shelves of a cherished library. It was fun staying with the land-development companies, seeing cattle and sheep by the million, sugar or grain carpeting the earth, timber as in the first days of creation. It was exciting at Mar del Plata, where we stayed with our Ambassador and Lady Macleay. At the Golf Club there, I saw the prettiest women in the world, so well-dressed that I could never remember more than the colour of their clothes. For the Argentine contrives that everything she wears is the exact expression of herself and what she is doing at

the moment. There is no over-emphasis on stuff. Jewels are not an accent as in South Africa. They are Johnsonian punctuation.

I hated leaving Argentina, but as there was so much to see on the Pacific, from Chile right up to Ecuador, we had to make up our minds to go. In May, 1932, we went to Pilkanyen in Patagonia. It is the end of the world, and it belongs to sheep. Its aristocracy is represented by the thousand-guinea merino rams from Australia, and its proletariat by the flock sheep worth four shillings apiece. Half of Patagonia lives by breeding sheep, and the other half by stealing them.

"I must say I prefer sheep to humans," said a successful farmer, who came from Perth in Scotland by way of Perth in Western Australia. "They've no faults at all so far as I can see, and they must have some sense because they've got memories."

I have never been so cold in my life. For five days we drove south with the Scot whose kingdom consisted of a pebbly plain, tufted with salt bush and crested with sharp, wind-driven ridges, streaked with granite. I forget how many sheep he pastured among neneo bushes which looked like a rough fur carpet tacked down by rocks between the tumbled hills. But I am sure they were some lordly part of a million. Nobody in Patagonia was concerned with lesser sums. When I was not half frozen by a wind like an iced razor-blade, it seems to me I was bending over a blazing neneo bush, the ready laid fire of Patagonia, warming my hands and body at its reassuring blaze.

Apart from insistent cold, the chief impression which remains with me is of emptiness. In the dun-coloured and deserted land, sheep, pastured at an average of one to five or ten acres, were invisible. If there were any fences at all, they went on for interminable leagues of wire, without any break except the bleached skeleton of an animal entangled in the strands. Yet it was a supremely picturesque country for those who appreciate desolation. The plains were sufficiently smooth to suggest sheets drawn taut against the sky. The thorny vegetation gathered into thickets. The landmarks were dark masses of rock split into talons and hammers. Beyond these were the Andes, lower towards the south, but always snow-covered and streaked in autumn with the scarlet of neri forests.

Traffic when we went south was limited to one cart troop or a couple of riders an hour. Ostriches, resembling draggled Degas ballerinas, and herds of guanacos,<sup>1</sup> were more plentiful than human beings. Occasionally we came upon a sundowner with skin like leather, and a thicket of beard instead of a muffler, crouching over a blazing neneo bush, eating some pitiful trifle out of a pot which he had probably rescued from a rubbish-heap. When peons rode by they were always muffled in blanket-like scarves which showed only their eyes under the brims of their wide black hats. Their ponchos<sup>2</sup> bellied in the wind

<sup>1</sup> A beast like a llama, resembling a cross between a camel and a sheep.

<sup>2</sup> Cloaks of black wool.

and they swung from side to side as they galloped, like dark-sailed cutters changing their tack. If they were Indians, they were round-faced and pleasantly shiny. They had a streak of sparse black moustache above sensuous lips, the slit eyes of the Mongol and the thatched black hair of a Japanese doll. They all wore 'rodilleras' (overtrousers) of goat-skin and huge capes made of wool. Their revolvers and the silver-embossed sheaths of their knives were attached to vast leather belts, but as it is illegal to show arms in a village, they were hidden under the mass of clothing which, added to their natural Patagonian fat, gave every rider the appearance of a sausage or a cocoon. South of Rio Negro as many clothes as possible are worn, by those who possess them, one on top of another. Undressing a Patagonian would take time and patience, but during eight months of the year undressing is just not done.

The women are particularly opulent, because adipose tissue is much admired. "How beautiful and large she is, look at the lovely fat on her!" is a common appreciation of a dame nearly as wide as she is long.

In Patagonia, when the track runs between fenced lands it has to be fifty metres wide. Along this ambles on horseback at some time or another, at an average of four or five miles an hour, the whole population of the countryside. Even prisoners ride. We passed a troop of seven jogging along on their own horses in charge of a couple of policemen. They were free to escape if they wanted, and they had a twenty days' journey in front of them to the nearest jail at Rawson, but they appeared quite contented. After all, the average sentence for murder is only six years, and most prisoners get out at half-time because the jails are overcrowded. For a 'bad murder' the sentence may be nominally twenty-five years, but there are ways of evading it. The local idea of a bad murder seems to be one in which a knife or two is broken in a corpse which has already been thoroughly killed.

In Chubut we heard of the 'pleiosaurus' which a one-time Texan cowboy saw in the lake at Epuyen. He saw it to such good purpose that a scientific expedition came to look for it, and to this day the country women won't wash their clothes in that lake. The ex-cowboy, who once shot the heels off a policeman's boots and hammers long nails into his own to take the place of spurs, still tells the tale when anyone will stand him a drink. He is the best bit of local colour in Chubut. For, alone in the district, he is forbidden to carry arms, because without warning he shot a cigar out of the mouth of a visitor who was not used to the ways of Patagonia.

All through our southward journey, while we froze upon the plains and thawed in hospitable farms at night, while we ate sheep or looked at them, while we talked and thought and dreamed of sheep, until I fully expected to bleat whenever I opened my mouth, the Andes had

been a blue-white barrier to the east. We crossed them in a bullock-cart, because in winter there is no other means of transport. A youth with a fourteen-foot pole prodded our team in their most susceptible parts, so that we achieved an average speed of a little over a mile an hour. All day we sat on our luggage, wrapped in everything we could find, and meditated on the startling beauty of our surroundings.

The Patagonian desert, which we had just left, might have been the other side of the world instead of across a solitary range.

Beech forests turning scarlet were spread beneath majestic snow-peaks of such spectacular shape that I felt they were part of a design for a modernist stage setting. Sunk between the forests, reflecting the green-white of glaciers and the continuous flames of the neri bushes, was a string of lakes, each of a different and distinctive colour. The scenic miracle continued for days. At night we found ourselves deposited by some form of land or water conveyance in front of a comfortable wooden hotel, the view from whose balconies was invariably enchanting. And eventually after crossing a flood of lava, in the crevices of which blackberries and fuchsias were beginning to grow, we rubbed our eyes and discovered ourselves not only in Chile, but in Germany.

The governor of the district had kindly come to meet us on the shores of the last lake. He was a delightful person. Politely ignoring our unaesthetic appearance, for we had spent the morning hauling various cars out of a magnificent variety of mud-holes, he offered to motor us to Osorno.

We started at two in the afternoon, and we had seven punctures. I do not know why, for the road was good. While the light lasted it did not much matter, because the country presented such an interesting contrast to the other side of the Andes. A few days ago, we had been on an ice-bound plain, tufted with dry and prickly scrub. In a hundred miles we had seen no human or animal life, except a herd of guanacos. But on the Chilean side of the mountains, it was difficult to realize we were in South America at all.

If the best-educated Patagonian sheep talk Gaelic, in Chilean Valdivia the dogs certainly bark in German. The wooden farm-houses with their projecting eaves look as if they had come from Bavaria. The pastures are closely turfed as Westphalian meadows. The paddocks are small and heavily fenced with timber, and the local inhabitants are large, blond Teutons, grandsons and great-grandsons of the colonists who came out eighty years ago to create a new Catholic and Liberal fatherland in Southern Chile. To-day, of course, they are staunch Chileans and the republic has no finer agriculturists, but I could not help blinking at the sight of those prosperous German farmsteads, with wooden water-towers and wooden steeples.

When it was quite dark, a rim came off one of the back wheels and ran gaily ahead of us. Arthur retrieved it. But the chauffeur had no

matches to vulcanize the inner tube, which by this time resembled a patchwork quilt. I lent him two which I found loose in my pocket.

A fog drifted up from the fields, and when we were able to start again we could hardly see the road. After a short time a whole wheel detached itself. It did so triumphantly, and before we ceased bumping, it disappeared into a ditch. The governor was not at all perturbed. "We are Indians here," he said cheerfully and incorrectly, "so we have much patience."

With the idea of telephoning to the nearest post of Carabineros, we strode blindly into the night, leaving his Excellency in the car—apparently walking was not a favourite pastime in Chile.

I heard a dog bark. "There must be a farm somewhere," said a young Englishman who had also come to meet us.

We heard several dogs before, making our laborious way across country, we bumped into solid wooden palings. It was lucky they were solid and over six feet high, for the pack inside behaved like wolves. I had never heard such an unpleasant and suggestive uproar. Watch-dogs on lonely Chilean farms are obviously trained to do more than bark.

In the midst of the pandemonium, a voice shouted in German from an upper window, "Don't come in! The dogs are treacherous." We replied that we had not the slightest intention of coming *in*. We were only afraid that the brutes would shortly come *out*!

Eventually a young man kicked his way through the pack. When he heard what had happened he shut up the dogs and brought us into the house. It was large and well heated. We sat in a spotlessly clean room and drank coffee out of cups with roses on them. A lamp with a pink silk shade hung over the table. Cushions with tucked satin borders were massed upon the sofa. Like all German houses, the place was full of family photographs and ornaments. Vases of artificial flowers shared the piano with a statue of the Madonna. The wallpaper was heavily patterned and there was a thick rug on the floor. Silver dishes, coffee-pots and salvers were ranged on a bureau. The whole impression was one of crowded conventional comfort.

The son of the house wore his working-clothes of thick khaki, but his mother was dressed in black silk, with a gold medallion at her throat. She introduced a dark, heavy-featured girl, whose hair hung in two long plaits below her waist. I gathered that she was the daughter-in-law, and I found myself watching her, because in spite of her fashionable clothes, her flesh-coloured stockings and her high heels on which she walked awkwardly, there was something strong and wild about her.

She would not talk, but her fine eyes watched us all the time. They were the eyes of a trapped animal. At last, while we were talking of our plans to visit Temuco, some words broke from her lips. In the

middle of them she put her hand across her mouth, as if frightened of what she had said. "I come from near Temuco—my home is there."

The old lady interrupted the disjointed Spanish, and she spoke deliberately in German. "Your home is here."

The girl's hands twisted. They were strong and dark-skinned like the rest of her. There was something rather splendid about her, but it did not go at all with the pink lampshade which had gilt bobbles round the edge, or with the opulent warmth and glitter of the room.

"I must go to my father's funeral—if I didn't I should be haunted," she gasped, and was silent, except for an occasional muttering about spirits.

Not another consecutive remark would she utter while we were in the room, though her husband—at least I suppose the good-looking young giant, blue-eyed and straw-coloured, was her husband—addressed her several times, and twice, passing her, he put an affectionate hand on her shoulder or touched her cheek. We learned later that she was the daughter of an Indian chief who had just died at Temuco.

Meanwhile, we telephoned our plea for assistance and went back to the car, having borrowed a comparatively sound inner tube. Hours later, when we had had several more mishaps and had progressed perhaps five miles, a rescue-party arrived with sandwiches and beer. The governor inspected the former under the headlights, explaining, "They sometimes use raw meat here," but I was too hungry to care what it was. We left an obliging Carabinero in the car and proceeded to the large town of Osorno, to central heating and hot baths.

In Santiago, I remember a wonderful dinner-party at 'the Edwardes'—he had been Chilean Ambassador in London. I remember also the Andene ranges rising in jewelled tiers like the walls of an opera house during a gala performance—and several revolutions. During one of these we arrived amidst shots and machine-gun fire at some town singularly unmoved. Arthur leaned out of the car to question a policeman. My husband was rather cross. "What's happening?" he asked. "Is it another revolution?" "Oh, no, Señor," said the admirably courteous Chilean. "It is the same as yesterday's."

Chile is among the most solidly established of South American republics. It has contrived to combine the inherited aristocracy of Spain with trading Britain and the labouring Andene Indians, in a system admirably progressive and tending towards democracy. But we saw the country in an unusual year, when Communism was ebullient. There were no less than six changes of government, but such 'revolutions' were not violent. Chile showed her excellent sense by continuing her ordinary life while Cabinets fell like ninepins. In those days I thought that as much was expected of the Ministers in power as of Joseph at the Court of Pharaoh or Joan of Arc before the Tribunal at Rheims. Many of them were exceptional in brains and



initiative, but the slump had beggared a land accustomed to mineral wealth. Millionaires were reduced to five figure incomes. Miners were without employment. Miracles were demanded of the Government.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

1932

### *Bolivian Adventures*

ONE OF THE MOST beautiful things I have seen is the contrast between the steel-blue glaciers of the Andes and the metal deserts, stained with all the colours of rusted iron. We flew from Santiago to Antofagasta—railhead for Bolivia. Looking down from the plane we could see snow and sand at the same time. The air was brilliantly clear. Nitrate camps were sunk in gullies among glittering shingle. There was not a blade of grass, for it never rains.

Leaning against my little window, I felt homesick for Africa. But where there should have been a camel caravan there was an engine or a line of trucks. Instead of the palaces and tombs of a dead city, there were the rusty tanks, the chimneys and the galvanized-iron sheds of a deserted 'officina'. Everything moving was mechanical. Every building was made of metal. It was a dead land, but horribly fecund, for it gave birth to colourless forms which were dwellings. Slabs of earth, roofed with wooden slats, were cut into houses for workers, and scraps of waste litter, held together with mud, sheltered the human jackals who were workless.

Flying low across this mechanical desert, I saw nothing moving but a blackened funnel attached to an invisible train, the dust-coloured smoke belching out of a chimney, as solid as if it were dirty cotton-wool, and a man jogging along on a mule, pulling a trolley behind him.

The hills were naked. They looked as if their crudely revealed surfaces were seared and decaying. The sunset was liquid fire out of which the stars slowly crystallized. In the twilight, the deserted 'officinas' twinkled into light and the suggestion of a ghostly activity. The working encampments were a blaze of electricity. Under a network of lights, surrounded by machinery which had the appearance of gibbets, were glittering white mountains—two years' supply of nitrate hoarded in the desert.

By that time the quality of my sickness had changed. The air was very bumpy over the metal hills. The plane shot up and down as if it was a lift. I had eaten too much. It was exceedingly hot. With eyes shut I endured—and hoped. Arthur, who is always kind when I am sufficiently *in extremis* to nauseate anyone else, saw the landing-

ground below. So he took one of the paper-bags, provided by good housekeeperly air lines for inconsiderate passengers, scribbled on it "only three minutes more" and pushed it into my hand. I did not open my eyes. "Perhaps he is right," I thought, and made full use of the bag. Simultaneously we landed. I was still clutching the bag when we got out. My head was whirling from the startling change of altitude. The ground seemed to me molten. Heat buffeted me as I stood in my heavy, furred coat, every idea blurred and the earth still waving up and down. "Smile, please," said a photographer. "Look this way," ordered others from opposite directions. "I should like your last impressions of Chile," said a crisp young reporter. His notebook was behaving like a concertina. "Oh," I said, and shut my eyes. Arthur rescued me as usual.

In Bolivia the Aramayos took charge of us. Carlos had been Bolivian Minister in London, and Renée, dark, attractive, deliciously amusing, Grosvenor Street's most popular hostess. I believe they own a mountain or two in their own country. They certainly own one of the most important South American newspapers. Whenever there is a presidential election, 'Aramayo' is one of the names suggested. It is always a power in the land, and under its shadow we travelled from one delight to another. For Bolivia is so astounding that dictionaries would have to be emptied as if they were pea-pods to make description possible. I shall never forget my first sight of the mountains. They look like precious metal. The rocks thrust their winged way upwards, each pinion separately eroded. They are red—a blazing incontrovertible red which makes one blink.

La Paz, the spectacular capital, is surrounded by a painted forest of rocks. The town is in a declivity a thousand feet below the plateau and the houses are scattered between moon-coloured cliffs, serrated by wind or time until their rapier points appear to be brittle as icicles. Beyond these crags, impermanent as the ghosts which disappear with sunrise, are the full-blooded crimson mountains. These are split into tapers and lances and steeples of rock, but the winged effect persists. In every conceivable colour and in every etiolated shape the ranges which surround La Paz spring flame-like into the sky. They are so little earthbound that they suggest a flight of arrows. Above them the twenty-two-thousand-foot peak of Illimani in her wrap of snow uses the hours and seasons to emphasize her detachment. Broom grows wild on the cliffs and the scent of it permeates the dust. During the Andes eruptions the sky was distilled copper, and the stars splinters of glass. I have never seen such colouring in any other part of the world.

The flower-beds of the plateau are the Cholo women in their skirts of many colours. Half Indian and half Spanish, they have an eye for colour. A Chola thinks nothing of wearing an orange skirt with a Madonna-blue blouse, under a cape of flaming rose. Across her shoulders she will tie a shawl of striped crimson and emerald. In it she may carry

a baby in a cherry-coloured velvet hat, looking soberly forward, two or three live ducks peering backwards, and the very dead head of a sheep.

The market street in La Paz, which climbs giddily from the old walls of St. Francis, resembles a palette on to which a reckless painter has squeezed the whole contents of his tubes. At the bottom there are the wheels of fortune, surrounded by a crowd of gamblers. Monkeys, more nearly orange than any other colour, dance gravely to the sound of a guitar. On each side of the climbing street are stalls laden with petticoats, cloaks and velvet blouses, all of them in elemental colours suited to the clear, washed air which has neither depth nor weight. Under these in a double row sit Indians and Cholos, selling all sorts of scraps—empty bottles for 'chicha', the raw spirit made from maize which is liable to eliminate the strongest sense of discretion after the second gulp; bundles of old keys; frozen potatoes; red peppers and equally scarlet egg-plants; herbs and fat and the foetuses of unborn llamas, which with a few nail-parings and some ends of hair are buried under the thresholds of new houses. Bundles of these horrible abortions swing on a stick. They cost sevenpence each and they look like bats with grossly exaggerated heads and spillikin legs, but they bring good luck to new buildings, so nobody would think of moving house without one.

A flock of llamas, bringing in their 'natural produce', which in a timberless altitude is used for fires, step haughtily through the crowd. They ignore the cars. They are indifferent to flattery or curses. Policemen try to stop them with a raised baton. Priests, shepherding a seminary into the cathedral, strive to prevent half a dozen curious llamas from joining their pupils. But neither Church nor State has any effect upon these animals. They go their own way.

In Bolivia, my allegiance to the carpincho wavered. Llamas became my idols. They have preposterous charm. It would be impossible to be rude to a llama. She would not even notice it. She has the dignity and the curves of a Victorian dowager. She carries her head with the same unconscious arrogance, and if she does happen to spit it is with the air of a great lady taking snuff. Not for her the angles and the flimsy clothing of modernity. The llama's wool is sufficiently thick to represent rows of Victorian petticoats worn one on top of the other and secured with the tape buttons which, for some unknown reason, suggest virginity. Her feet might have been crushed into the heel-less sandals of the 'nineties, always a size too small. Her nose is at an angle which to-day would be considered snobbish. For the llama cannot forget that she is royal and that all the rest of the world are housemaids. Somewhere under her lifted nostrils they are obviously destined to scrub floors or remove the stones from her path.

We drove for some six hundred miles across Bolivia to see more winged mountains and more llamas. We went to Potosi, dominated

by the cone of the silver mountain. Out of it, in the Middle Ages, the Spaniards took five hundred million dollars' worth of ore. It is still the mint of the world.

In Bolivia nobody says, "Come and look at my garden." They suggest instead, "Let me show you my mountain."

Potosi is like one of those dreams hurrying to an illogical climax before early morning tea. The streets are cobbled and the houses colour-washed blue, yellow, rose. The tiled roofs might be pot-pourri. Under this drift of faded petals, balconies emerge. They are carved wooden boxes, with lattices almost meeting across the street. The doors and windows are cracked. Nothing matches. Everything is out of alignment. Flocks of llamas, apparently in charge of a donkey, pass without mixing. There is an alley of petticoats, where bundles of women's skirts hang along the walls. In the market, sheep have to be sold complete with heads and skins, lest dogs be substituted to the benefit of the butchers.

On St. John's Day, the Indians light fires along the streets to keep away evil spirits, and on Corpus Christi there is a great procession, during which everyone must kneel. If any stranger hesitates to remove his hat, it is knocked off his head, for the Indians are superstitious if not devout. They are not going to offend any god if they can help it. So they decorate their roofs with a broken pot, one of the oldest pagan symbols, a cross and a bull's horns, or wooden effigies of a man to ensure fecundity.

They wear all sorts of charms and amulets, and their ideas about medicine are peculiar. A woman came to see our host doubled up and strangely swollen round the waist. She wanted to be cured, but refused to be examined. Such odd sounds came from her middle that the doctor finally used force. When he had straightened out his unwilling patient, he found she had a whippet bound round her waist. It was the dog which was ill, and the woman hoped to cure it by taking the medicine herself.

Between Potosi and Sucre, the old capital, we descended to the bed of the Pilcomayo River to eat chirimoyas, which are not unlike custard apples. We got very sticky. I think we spent the night in a primitive inn—probably because I could not resist some particularly angelic llamas. Next day we started early and drove madly. We had an inflated sense of freedom, for at last we had escaped reporters. In Sucre, we would be unknown.

The car bounced and bucketed. I took off my hat. Somewhere, we acquired a vast bunch of bananas. While we careered over impossible hills, furred with cactus, we grew cold and hot by turns, but always more and more smeared with banana. Even Arthur was less elegant than usual. He had recently acquired a distressing habit of wrapping himself—as if it were a maternity gown—in an ancient mackintosh three sizes too large. It did not matter, I comforted myself, for we had

no friends in Sucre. As soon as we arrived, we could have a bath. Several baths, I thought, would be necessary.

Disaster overtook us in a particularly hot ravine. We had noticed several cars descending the opposite side. A fiesta of sorts, I thought. It was.

As soon as our dusty vehicle bumped into the dry river-bed, a stream of people flowed to meet us. They were neat, cool, and terribly well dressed. There was the mayor with an admirably expressed address of welcome. There was a child in starched frills clutching a bouquet, and a spinster-schoolmistress with a poem, of which—with ears burbling from staggering changes of altitude—I could not hear a word. There was a bishop, portentous and benign. There were any number of smiling councillors prepared to be pleased, and when they saw us—smeared, dishevelled, and tongue-tied—courteously determined to hide their surprise. There was an Englishman, probably the Consul. He refused to lose his head. Coolly he removed a banana from my hand and placed my hat on my head. I was sure it was back to front, but did not like to take it off to make sure.

Spanish, in which I am generally fluent, deserted me. Arthur who, for some unknown reason, always preferred the past or future tenses in this language to the present, said to the first eminent citizens who shook his hand, “This *was* my wife—I mean she *will be* my wife.”

The mayor tried to hide his surprise. The Bishop permitted himself an expression of faint disapproval. The Consul took charge of the situation. “She *is* his wife . . . they are tired,” he said. Arthur laughed. When he chooses, he has more charm than anyone I know. He chose—then.

Everything suddenly became all right. Even the bananas seemed less ubiquitous.

In procession we drove to Sucre. It is a heavenly town. The manners and the movements of motors are as restrained as those of the inhabitants, for the capital of old-time Bolivia has the dignity of inherited traditions. Except in learning, it does not compete with the metropolis of skyland, where the height is responsible for many exaggerations. In La Paz, time races with overworked hearts. In Sucre it lingers out of deference to the past. Nothing changes. A public official is still in the deepest mourning for a wife who died ten years ago. It is true that the houses put on new faces for the centenary of Bolivian independence, but inside they kept their Spanish cortiles, painted yellow and deep pink, full of jasmine, tangerines and honeysuckle. The daily newspaper comes out at noon. The hotel and the club exchange the necessary ingredients for cocktails. In the cathedral there is a Madonna whose robes are stiff with pearls, rubies and emeralds. Clusters of jewelled watches are sewn upon her skirt. Her crown and her sleeves are of diamonds. She is called ‘The Virgin of Jewels’, but how many tears have been shed over her necklaces and

rings? The finest belonged to a bride who died on her wedding day. The collar of pearls was an heiress's legacy to a poor cousin, but her parents, ignoring the wishes of the dead, presented it to the Virgin.

The arcades of St. Francis are delicious. So are the gardens full of flowers and the country-women in their shiny white steeple hats. So, above all, is the atmosphere of intimacy and assurance, the generous hospitality and the welcome accorded to strangers.

The University alone is concerned with Socialism. A professor presented me with a pamphlet he had written about 'Students and the Revolution', but I could not imagine Sucre dyed a violent red. It is too personal a town. The local inhabitants never know the names of their own streets, but they can tell where everyone lives.

#### CHAPTER XXXV

1932

#### *Ahead of Revolution—Into Peru*

THE MOST EXCITING THING we did in South America was to ride across two or three hundred miles of Sierra between Cuzco to La Mejorada on the Peruvian railway line, leading to Lima. Revolt had broken out in Trujillo. Appalling tales were current. We heard of torture and massacre as we entered the mountains. Whenever we halted—in hamlet or farm—rumour raced to greet us. We were always being told that the official who had mounted us in the last village had been murdered in some ingeniously horrible way. So it seemed to us that we were riding for our lives—just ahead of revolution.

The high Sierra between winged Bolivia and the historical stateliness of Peru is a closed land, sullen and suspicious. The people do not like foreigners, and a 'foreigner' is anyone born outside the district. We asked a village workman, who looked as if he sometimes experimented with soap, if he was a Peruvian. Surprised, he answered, "No, I come from these mountains. Why should you take me for a foreigner?"

The Sierra is composed of hot, narrow valleys, high downs covered with slippery 'lunar' grass, and passes rising to sixteen thousand feet. Into it we rode from the village of Limatamba. Our luggage was carried by a reluctant mule. Three Guardia Civile came with us. All they wanted to do was to sleep. They had not been paid for months.

We spent the first night at a hacienda.<sup>1</sup> Our host was charming and voluble. He regretted intensely that he could not hire us a mule to relieve our overburdened baggage animal, but all his were hours away working in the cane. However, in the morning he would arrange everything. We need not worry at all.

<sup>1</sup> Estate or big farm.

Morning came. The Guardia Civile slept. So did our host. He had given orders not to be aroused till noon, when we should be safely out of his way. The place was littered with mules. It seemed to me I had never seen so many in my life.

The bailiff, who was young and less inhospitable than the usual inhabitant of the Sierra, refrained from comment. We both did our best to avoid falling over the mules that were so "many hours distant in the sugar-cane". We talked of the Aprista<sup>1</sup> movement, and the young man spoke with the unction of Brutus and the tongue of Cicero about the needs of oppressed humanity.

At that moment, in Trujillo, oppressed humanity was rising under the A.P.R.A.<sup>1</sup> banner and excesses unrivalled since the days of the Conquistadores were being perpetrated on the bodies of captured loyalists. But I did not know this until, ten days later, the end of our journey brought us into the zone of martial law.

The second day in the Sierra was spent clambering up and down ridges steep enough to discourage the most goat-blooded. Indians passed with their caravans of donkeys. One was laden with cages of green parrots. A number of the birds sat upon the heads and quarters of their transport. They all looked very wise and superior.

We spent the night in a loft which was supposed to be an inn. Fortunately there was no light, so we could not see what we ate. It tasted like leather soaked in tallow. A vast dead condor hung on the wall. A dead horse lay outside.

Next morning it took longer than usual to wake the Guardia Civile. After three unsuccessful efforts, one of them condescended to stagger, unshaved and unwashed, to the prison, from which he released a couple of Indians to drive the new mules. We rode over more ridges interspersed with high grass-land where cattle were pastured, and eventually we came to Abancay. There were subsequent moments when we thought we should never leave it.

The prefect had been ordered to help us with transport. So he promised to lend us the Guardia Civile horses and to have mules and muleteers ready at six the next morning. This promise in all its glory was sufficient, he felt. There was no need to carry it out. He detested foreigners. He was worried about the Trujillo revolution. He felt he ought to make money out of us somehow, but in view of the recommendations we brought, he did not see how he could safely do it. Then he had a brilliant idea. He 'lost' the letter we had brought from the exceedingly active and capable military prefect of Cuzco, and said he had never received it. After this he disappeared, which was something of a feat in a village the size of Abancay, but not before he had arranged matters with Shylock, the owner of the only horseflesh capable of covering the next hundred and fifty miles in five days. The following morning was one of the most unsatisfactory I have ever spent.

<sup>1</sup> Aprista and A.P.R.A. mean Popular Alliance of American Revolution<sup>1</sup>.

Accompanied by a delightful English Missionary, to whom we owe a great deal, because without his help we might still be in Abancay, we set forth on an animal hunt which soon became generic. We did not care what sort of beasts we procured, providing they were oblong and had a more or less sound leg at each corner. Alarmed by the news that a German commercial traveller had arrived in the village three weeks previously and was still looking for transport, we shut our eyes to the deficiencies of Shylock's horseflesh.

"The chestnut stumbles," murmured the Missionary. "I think I ought to warn you."

"Thank you," we said, and reluctantly hired the chestnut.

We also engaged a fat and rather charming rogue called Sancho Panza to act as guide, and two muleteers who asked for payment in advance. The chief, perhaps the only, sport of the Sierra is fleecing the foreigner. The half-castes are experts. They trust no one, least of all their own people. Having received from us sufficient money for five days' food, they presented it to their families or hid it and prepared to start with nothing at all, convinced that the foreigner would not let them starve.

But for some time there was no question of starting. Mules were continually promised, but they never arrived. Sancho Panza was surprised at our discomfort. "A promise means nothing here," he said. "There are neither hours nor promises in the mountains. You must forget both."

We did so.

After searching the village closely as city police after opium, we discovered the owner of a mule. Of course, it was his dearest possession and unused to mountaineering, but the Missionary, as persuasive as he was patient, induced the man to hire it for a great price. Not only that, but he established himself on the one chair in the mule-owner's store and said he would wait there till the beast arrived. Furtively I went out to eat. Returning later to nourish our benefactor with oranges, I found him mopping his forehead. "I think perhaps I ought to have some sort of food," he said. "You see, I was too busy for breakfast."

It was five o'clock when we left Abancay in a motor lent by the still invisible prefect. It was to take us downhill to the bridge, where the caravan—a patchwork of ill-assorted and ineffective beasts—would be waiting. The driver could only use one hand. With the other he was obliged to hold the wire which established contact with the ignition. Consequently, we nearly died a dozen times, for the road was rough, the corners sharp and the brakes negligible. The following week, the prefect, the sub-prefect and an officer who had made determined efforts to produce mules for us, were killed on that same road, when the car, held together by hope and the driver's left hand, went over the edge of a precipice.



We left the bridge in dusk and a high wind and climbed steadily for six hours. The pass which we had to cross was fourteen thousand feet above sea-level. Until half-past seven there was a crescent moon. Then it disappeared over the ridge and I could see nothing but the white quarters of the horse in front of me. The track was barely two feet wide. It lost itself in thickets of thorns which tore our faces, and dropped into river-beds. The ride became a nightmare, in which all sense of reality was lost. The darkness of the ravines seemed to be solid and the mountain-side a tunnel into which Sancho Panza disappeared. Sometimes there was a splash and the sound of slipping stones as the leading horse plunged, girth-deep, into a stream. At an open-fronted hut we paused to talk to Indians huddled among their beasts. "You won't get across to-night," they said. When we left the thorn forest it was so cold we could scarcely feel the reins. The usual sensations left us so that we clung stiffly to the saddles, conscious only of pain at the extremities of numbed arms and legs and of the repetitive jerks of the horses' withers.

From the summit we saw what appeared to be a valley surrounding a lake on which lights floated, but the water was mist. We walked down, clinging to the animals' tails and stumbling over our borrowed spurs, which were nearly as long as bayonets. Sancho Panza strode ahead, his poncho trailing behind him. When we reached the first houses, a horde of dogs attacked us and we had to remount. Amidst their clamour and the squeals of bitten horses, we rode into a sleeping plaza surrounded by effigies of mud houses crumbling into ruin. By two o'clock we succeeded in waking an innkeeper, who accorded us the privilege of sharing a couple of unclean mattresses with a varied selection of insects.

We left that village, which was called Huancarama, before the fleas had finished their meal and rode across a variety of hills, with an arid range, snow-powdered, in the distance. A mule caravan passed us laden with panama hats. Each animal carried what appeared to be a tower swaying in the wind. The Indians, who never possessed any watch but the sun, greeted us with "Good day" up till noon, and a minute or two later they changed their salutation to "Good evening". Down an apparently unending descent, we rode behind a Cholo woman in a number of rose flannel skirts which looked like peony petals. Then we climbed again till we reached the downs of Andahuaylas, where nomads were camped with their pack animals. After an eleven hours' ride we found lodging in a village whose inhabitants were only less distrustful than our followers. The walls were peeling. The beds were full of cockroaches. Filthy rags hung at the windows, but apparently these amenities were beyond the price of virtue or of honesty. Sancho Panza stacked the saddlery and slept on it for fear of thieves. He would have liked the horses to share our rooms, but this being impossible, owing to the nature of the steps which led to them, he

instructed a muleteer to entangle himself among their legs so that only over his sleeping body could the animals be stolen. The inn-keeper refused to provide forage until the price of it was paid. Sancho Panza refused to part with money—our money—until he had seen the *altalta*. The muleteers said they could not afford to buy food, so while we fed by the light of a tallow candle, they wandered round the table snatching fragments from our plates lest they should be returned to the kitchen. We bought them bread and they gulped it down in front of us, afraid someone should snatch it from them.

Next day, accompanied by a new and surprisingly wide-awake Guardia Civile, we rode over a deserted pass, littered with vast grey boulders, any one of which our guide assured us might hide a bandit. "It is a lawless province," he said, carrying his carbine ready across the front of his saddle while he explained the local habits. "There was a rising here in which more than two hundred were killed, and last month we went through the villages and shot another twenty-five." "Innocent or guilty?" we asked, for justice in the mountains is apt to be content with any victim. "There are no innocents in the Sierra," replied the Guardia in a gloomy voice. "As soon as a boy can use a sling, he is out among the rocks waiting for a chance to kill, and the women are as bad as the men. No unarmed traveller could cross this pass and be certain either of keeping his property or his life." He pointed out a boulder from behind which an expert with stone and sling had killed an Indian at a hundred and twenty yards, before robbing him of his beasts. But nothing happened to us, and we spent the night at a hacienda which made raw spirit out of sugar-cane. It sold this at great profit to Indians and half-castes who subsequently quarrelled with the aid of knives made in Germany, but the sole decoration of the house consisted of posters setting forth the horrors of alcoholism. The owner of the farm was in Lima. The half-Indian administrator promised to sell us maize. He gave us beds in an out-house full of vermin. On the cracked mud walls were more realistic representations of the drunkard's fate. While we wondered whether paralysis was preferable to madness, or murder to the second infancy which seemed to have overcome one of the victims of alcohol scorned by a highly coloured wife and family, insects prepared to feed.

We left next morning feeling more than partly worn, and without the provisions and grain which were to have been ready for us several hours earlier.

Fortunately, on our way to Rio Pampas, we met a charming Peruvian who nourished us on the contents of his saddle-bags, for the mountain people will sell nothing. They said they had no forage. They looked as if they had never heard of food.

With our new companion, we descended through jungle into the river-bed. It was infested with flies, and the only means of crossing was by a cobweb bridge, slung high above the stream. We were obliged

to unsaddle and unload our animals, tie some garment over their eyes and drag them across one by one. In a high wind progress would be difficult, because the bridge swings with every footstep. Provident Indians strip their beasts lest, in falling over the edge, they take so much as a halter or a tassel tied to an ear. The ascent on the further side was a chute of loose, slippery rocks. As we scrambled up the exceedingly narrow track, it seemed as if the whole cliff were crumbling round us.

That night we arrived at Okros, where the storekeeper was supposed to have a clean room which he would rent to us "for a good sum". The village consisted of a few broken mud hovels on the top of a wind-swept hill. It appeared to be deserted. Long before we arrived, the storekeeper, in a frenzy of suspicion, had barricaded himself into his house in order to pretend he was absent. Not all the eloquence of the charming Peruvian, insinuated through the shutters, could move him from his hiding-place. The mention of money may have unsettled his thoughts, but it did not make him open his door. So the three of us spent the night in a stable with our joint collection of muleteers huddled outside. The Peruvian, who had a German father, which contributed perhaps to his efficiency, fed us all from his saddle-bags. He called them Alpha and Omega, but we never came to the end of them. Our subsequent rest, on stones and mud, was disturbed by the fears of the muleteers, who seemed to expect immediate attack—the Sierran's anticipation of disaster is surely unequalled by any other pessimism! So nobody minded starting at four in the morning, although it was dark and the mountain track sheeted with ice. That pass, called The Watching Puma because of a curiously-shaped stone on the summit, is supposed to be sixteen thousand feet above sea-level. The Indians say it is the worst climb between Cuzco and Ayacucho, from where it is possible to motor by a fearsome mountain road (eight or ten in a communal Ford car, heaped with baggage, parrots, a monkey or two and perhaps a young tiger-cat) to the railway at La Mejorada.

Dawn found us half-way up the pass. We heard the long-drawn groan of horns blown to assemble the village labourers as we struggled towards the sun which gilded the crest. "That sound enrages the bulls," said the charming Peruvian. "They cannot stand it."

He told us how the Indians believe that donkeys always bray at the hour so "farmers here don't need any other clock".

He showed us the piles of stones to which every traveller adds. "On his way back each man looks to see if his stone is in place. If it has fallen, it means his wife has been unfaithful to him."

We reached the top of the pass four hours after we had started. Thereafter we rode interminably over a wide grassy plateau broken by ravines that were sheer gashes in the earth, stuffed with broom and heavily scented bushes. Night found us labouring up and down a

succession of these chasms. Cactus tore at the saddles. Ghostly pepper trees stood sentinel above a chasm porous with caves and littered with strange, petrified formations which suggested decay. The leaves of the eucalyptus glittered in the moonlight. They shook like the spears of an untrained host. Fires on the distant hills were exaggeratedly definite, so that the foreground became immaterial. We rode without sense of our surroundings. The trees were mirage, the ravine below us a grave without known dimensions and the track a filament dropped into space. "I cannot see," said the charming Peruvian. "I cannot feel. I am not sure that I am alive." We had been riding for seventeen hours and our horses were so tired they could hardly put one foot in front of another.

At last the lights of Ayacucho flared across a plain. They looked as if they were within a hand's grasp, and it took us two more hours to reach them.

We led our stumbling horses into a shuttered town. All doors were closed by order of authority. Armed guards patrolled the streets. Crowds gathered in the square, where mounted police waited with carbines ready. The news of the Trujillo revolution was on everyone's lips. We heard about the massacre in the prison, where hearts were cut out and flung into the street and bodies mutilated beyond description.

Rumour was a wild thing running in more and more unlikely ways. We heard—without the slightest basis of truth—that Cuzco was in the hands of the Communists and that our friend, the Commandant of the region, with whom we had ridden just ten days previously on the eve of our journey through the Sierra, had been killed. This wholly incorrect information was whispered in the dark yard of the inn. The light had failed. Frightened people crept about with candles. "We must not talk here," said a traveller, still holding the bridle of an exhausted mule. "It is too dangerous, the place is full of spies. They are everywhere. The Government depends on them, thousands of them, I tell you, men, women and children. You cannot tell who may be a spy."

Later, from the balcony, we watched the clearing of the square. "If one shot is fired, the town goes," said the innkeeper, and looked around nervously to see if he had been overheard.

But there was no shot, and next day, when a dozen people had warned us, with as much mystery as possible, not to go in any and every desirable direction, the news came that Trujillo had been retaken by Government troops. The revolution was at an end. The townsfolk of Ayacucho relaxed. They ate their extremely tough lunch without glancing over their shoulders and wondering whether their harmless neighbours were spies. But still, across the cathedral wall and the door of the Prefectura, on the balcony where a few hundred years ago sat the tribunal of the Inquisition and the steps of the cross in

front of which its victims were burned, was scrawled the watchword of revolutionary youth, "Viva the A.P.Ĥ.A.," or with a bigger flourish in an illiterate hand, "Long live the Communists of Peru!"

## CHAPTER XXXVI

1932

### *Many Things Happen—to South America—and to Me*

IN LIMA I have Spanish cousins, for my great-great-grandmother was a Peruvian. In Lima I felt at home—but sad. For the lovely, stately city belongs to the past. The great churches and the streets shadowed by discreet wooden balconies suggest Toledo or Seville. Lima, seat of the old vice-royalty, headquarters of the Conquistadores, used to dictate religion to the Chaco and industrial terms to River Plate. She was the centre of whatever civilization Spain sent west, and she cannot forget her past. Her streets are haunted by the ghosts of cavaliers whose horses were shod with silver, of quixotic rascals and adventurers to whom gold was more important than the Cross. The viceroys were little less powerful than the Kings of Spain. Hidalgos and grandees, courtiers and courtesans, soldiers and priests and slaves thronged their capital and intrigued for a share of the legendary wealth which had caused the downfall of the Incas. The Inquisition cast a shadow over the city, and for two centuries its victims, in yellow sleeveless robes with ropes round their necks, were driven through the streets of Lima towards the flames which put an end to their tortures.

Among the ghosts which haunt Pizarro's city may be that of Maria de Castro, last victim of the Holy Office in Peru. As the mistress of a viceroy, she drove through the cobbled streets in a golden coach, saluted as 'the most beautiful' by the young nobles who sought her favours. Ten years later, betrayed to the Inquisition by a suitor she had refused, she was dragged to the place of execution, so crippled by torture that she could not walk. A happier spirit must be the 'Perra Choli', the favourite of Don Manuel Amat, at one of whose masked balls a cardinal is said to have danced upon the supper table, his scarlet robes over his head. But there are sterner ghosts, the shades of rebels and conspirators executed when the conquerors turned upon each other and fought more savagely than they had done against the Incas.

Lima belongs to the past. She sold the honour and the courage of her warriors for gold. She was the goal of traitors and those who sought to win by intrigue that which the Pizarro brothers had taken by savage force. Lima must be exhausted by her own cruelties. She has known too many tortures and too many breaches of faith. At the moment of our visit, the son of the last president and the presidential

candidate of the Third International were both in prison. The educated youth of Peru was in the hands of the Comintern. Its 'ghosting' was dictated by men as ambitious as the Conquistadores who destroyed the Communism of the Incas in favour of a Spanish dictatorship. The next revolution, we thought, might eliminate a feudalism which has survived imperial rule, and replace the ancient system under the dictatorship of the Kremlin instead of the Children of the Sun.

Throughout South America, the Presidents had received us with interest and hospitality. We had been deeply impressed by the great Getulio Vargas, creator of modern Brazil, and by General Justo, the charming Argentine. President Tierra in Uruguay became a friend, for I returned three winters running to that enchanting—and illogical—republic which plays with time as if it were a film to be rolled backwards and forwards, in slow movement, or fantastically accelerated according to taste. But Sanchez Cerra of Peru remains in my mind because he was of the people, a half-Indian, born of the Andene rock, heir to the Incas. When we knew him, he looked thirty and was said to be ten years older. He was a little man, of strong will, a Socialist by training and speech, determined, intelligent and fearless. Oddly enough, he was put into power by the Civilista or Conservatives because they had no candidate of their own. He had led an army revolt and—in the resulting election—defeated the Communist, Haya de la Torre, leader of the Aprista, by 54,000 votes. He told us, I remember—with a completely expressionless face—of all the attempts on his life. He carried a scrap of llama foetus as a charm and was convinced that he would be killed by the thirteenth shot fired at him. He was wrong. Within a year he was assassinated. Upon the steps of the palace which he refused to leave, he set an example to the kings of the world. "This is where the people have placed me. Here I must stay," he said, facing—alone and unarmed—a revolutionary mob. The fifth shot killed him in front of the office he would not yield.

In Peru, Arthur decided he had had enough of travel. It had at times been wearing. For in eight months we had never escaped publicity. Our tempers were beginning to fray. Under persistent smiles, we felt volcanic, but the only victims we could afford were each other. It was, therefore, as well that we parted, but as soon as I went off alone into Ecuador, I felt disconsolate. Jivaro head-hunters and the exquisite beauty of Quito failed to comfort me. The capital is deliciously rococo. It has every grace and no pretensions. The charm of the Spanish colonial empire is unspoiled, for by a miracle, no government has built modern offices or skyscrapers. Apart from the splendid churches, their gold-leaf and their candles, I was most impressed by the importance accorded to the individual, and by a party at the American legation.

It happened that I arrived in Quito just after an election which had given the Presidency to a brilliant Liberal politician called Neptali

Bonifaz. But already revolution was pending. Nobody could explain why. After dining with the President-elect, I found a crowd of reporters waiting for me in the hotel. Delighted to be able to talk about somebody else—instead of about myself with whom, by that time, I was overwhelmingly bored—I praised the wisdom and the statesmanship of the host I had just left. Next day the papers recorded what I had said. Within a few hours President Bonifaz had written me at length thanking me for my valuable support. The incident still seems to me surprising, measured by British standards.

The party at the American legation was given in my honour. It was delightful and amusing, but I was puzzled by the interest I roused. Never had I had such a success—especially with men. Everyone said they had read my first book. Every male under sixty invited me to dine. They indicated that breakfast would gladly be provided. Their elders looked, longed and regretted! I could not understand. Sur-reptitiously, I glanced into mirrors. It seemed to me that I looked much as usual. My clothes by this time were considerably worn. I could not flatter myself that they were either fashionable or exceptionally becoming. Yet tides of flattery lapped around me. Masculine adulation warmed me. "Why?" I asked an engaging young man who raved about my first book. "Why did you trouble to read it?" Surely Ecuador could not be so interested in the Sahara. Bewildered, I waited for the reply. It was enlightening. "I have always adored blondes," said the young man, looking at me as if I were Scandinavian Freya. "But I am not a blonde," I said. Comprehension chilled me. Nobody—except my kindly American hosts—had read my travel books. Every man in the room thought I was the talented author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

Back to Guayaquil I went—in the hot lands by the sea. There, while I waited for a steamer, I had great fun in the company of some young men who owned miles of forest, swamp and cocoa plantations. With one of them, I went up the Guayas River in a speed-boat. "It is dangerous to go quickly because of crocodiles and submerged timber," he said. Simultaneously, he opened the throttle to show he did not care what happened. After some sixty miles of avoiding disaster—in the form of driftwood, islets of floating weed and inconsequent half-castes piled into canoes with their pigs—we arrived at Babahoyas. There a young 'haciendero' met us. He looked the part. For he wore a largely-checked skirt and a broad-brimmed hat. His trousers were held up by an enormous belt from which depended a revolver and a machete, while his top-boots crinkled into beautiful folds and were adorned with spurs the size of saucers. He had a delightful smile, spoke perfect French and was prepared for anything. "I don't in the least know what you want to do," he said, "but I've got some horses, also a clean shirt and a toothbrush."

The horses were swum across the river three or four at a time beside

a canoe, which they did their best to founder. On the further bank, I was offered a choice of mounts. There were many more ponies than we needed, but the others ran alongside, so that we started through the sugar-cane in the centre of a troop. The animals would not canter or trot, but they *ran* without stopping for league after league. At first it was a tiring pace to sit, but after a few hours I got used to it.

We ran through cocoa forests where the trees grew as tall as English oaks. Harvest was just over, but a few daffodil-yellow cones about eight inches long were still attached to the branches, from which they swell stemless and sharply ridged, so that they look like some great insect clinging to the bark. Where Venezuelan cocoa had been introduced the pods were a vivid carmine.

Labourers, naked to the waist, their golden-brown bodies gleaming as if they had been oiled, gigantic knives stuck in their belts, use bamboo poles to detach the fruit, after which they split it with a machete, put the seeds into sacks and send them on muleback to the hacienda to be sun-dried.

After some time our little horses ran out of the old cocoa plantations which had been allowed to grow wild. We crossed a number of streams where a mass of tropical plants hung over the water. We sank into bogs and scrambled out of them coated in black slime. Dock-leaves the size of rafts met over our heads. The steaming breath of the jungle glued our shirts to our backs. Girth-deep in mud, we wallowed past houses made of cane lacework, from whose apertures peered brown pigs and brown women. Peons, naked but for a strip round the waist, the belt which held their machete, and a gigantic hat, rode barefoot, but with bayonet spurs strapped above their heels. Cardinal birds were splashes of scarlet. Wild boar, deer and jaguar moved in the forest. We continued to run, until my horse fell flat on his chest in three feet of water with a great deal of mud underneath.

Subsequently, we arrived at a hacienda where we were to spend the night. It was built of wood, and the first floor, supported on poles, spread into wide, netted verandas on which each room was isolated. Half-past six is mosquito hour in Ecuador. Precisely at that moment, there is a hum along the wired porches, which gathers volume as the indignant insects realize they are to be robbed of the food whose human odour attracted them out of the forest.

Country life is easy. Nobody dies of hunger, because all meals grow wild in the jungle. So do the materials for house-building. When estates cut down the number of their employees, the negroid or semi-Indian families remain in their high houses on stilts and cultivate patches of ground scooped out of the forest.

"They've no needs, no wants and no knowledge to make them into politicians," said the young man in the check shirt.

Life in the haciendas is nearly as simple as it is in the surrounding huts. Breakfast is at six, lunch at eleven, dinner at half-past five and



bedtime at nine. Red-brown water from the river is brought up in petrol-tins when anyone wants a bath. Food consists of rice, vegetables, soup, cold coffee essence, milk if the cows happen to be in the right mood, butter which resembles oil, strips of meat which might well be saddlery, bread, bananas and pawpaw. Hammocks slung on the verandas provide extra beds, for hospitality is unbounded. It is taken for granted by every traveller. There are no inns in the forest, so the haciendas generously provide food and lodging after sunset.

When clouds hang low and the sun is obscured, workers sigh with relief. It is a beautiful day.

Nobody walks. Even children scramble on to a bare-backed horse to ride a hundred yards. Nobody marries. "It's most awkward," said the young 'haciendero'. "We've just had the Bishop here, and he wanted to marry all the village women to the men with whom they were living. He offered to do it free! But the women refused. They said, 'If he beats me now, I can go back to my mother, but if I'm married to him, I can't get away. I have to stay and be beaten again.'"

The village was still hung with paper flags as we rode through it next morning. The local Christians were just recovering from the thirty-six-hours' bout during which, in honour of the episcopal presence, they had drunk themselves to incapacity. We met three pretty girls whose hair was permanently crimped by the dark blood they had inherited. One of them had four children, each by a different father. One was considered to have done well for herself, because she was the *mattresse en titre* of a neighbouring landowner, and the third was regarded with awe because she was fifteen and still virgin. We crossed a bridge made of planks which arched perilously across the river. It had a fine roof but no railings, and there was a hole in the middle where the baker, riding across with a basket of loaves on each arm, had fallen through it. On the bank sat a child of twelve in a scarlet print overall. She was playing with her first baby as if it were a doll.

We rode through more cocoa plantations. When we reached the bank of a navigable river, there was much argument as to what we should do. Our provisions consisted of bananas and pawpaw, our luggage of saddle-bags and one dispatch-case. Two canoes were waiting.

"Better take off your riding-boots," said the 'haciendero'. "It's easier to swim without them, and if one does upset one has to be quick because of the crocodiles."

By the time we set off down-stream, we had discarded a good deal of clothing. In the first canoe went three pairs of boots and the saddle-bags, paddled by a half-Indian and a half-nigger. In the second were the young townsman, who wore a pair of blue cotton trousers, torn in several places and patched in others, and the young countryman in bathing-drawers—held up by the revolver-belt which also carried a

machete—a wrist-watch, yellow glasses and a cart-wheel hat. Between them, on the floor of the canoe, I felt overdressed in riding-breeches, a shirt and blue spectacles.

"Well, I don't know how, where, or when we're going," said the 'haciendero', magnificently wielding a paddle, "but I hope these fellows ahead don't upset my spare shirt and my toothbrush."

"My launch ought to be waiting at Arenal," returned the other man.

For three or four hours we paddled down the Chojampe River. We passed crocodile-fishers with harpoons which they ejected from a steel handle containing a spring. On the sand-banks were the skeletons of crocodiles stripped for their skins and subsequently picked clean by vultures. Masses of purple water-lilies narrowed the channel. Cormorants, known locally as 'duck-crows', were so thick upon certain trees that the branches looked as if they were suffering from old-fashioned upholstery.

Where the jungle thickened, the bushes trailing over the river were full of iguanos. These monstrous lizards, yellow, copper, brown or green according to their age, lay motionless along the branches. The pouches under their throats became part of the foliage, and the great crests ruffled above their spines were scarcely distinguishable from the bark whose colours they had stolen.

When the next reach was sunlit, the men bathed from the canoe, which had previously to be wedged against the bank. When it was shadowed by the jungle they talked. As far as I remember, the conversation was chiefly concerned with the position of women in Ecuador. Fragments remain in my mind, such as, "Women are desired but not esteemed. They don't count at all or else they count too much. They will accept any behaviour on the part of their husbands, because divorcees have no social position. Wives are moral because they hardly ever leave their houses. They have a child every year, and they're nearly always in mourning for some member of the family. Oh, but mourning is a curse! Here one mourns a parent for three years and a husband for ten or twenty. Men do not want the companionship of women. They decide whom they will marry before they fall in love. A youth says to himself, 'That one will be my affair,' because her family or her fortune is suitable, and without even seeing her, he tells himself that he is in love with her. In Quito they are more modern, but in Guayaquil young people do not see much of each other until they are married. Courtship is apt to be by telephone or through the window. I tell you, youths of the best families will stand in the street and compliment the girl they want to marry by gazing up at her window. We are still Spanish, although in Quito they would be French, without knowing how to set about it. The cocottes don't know their business. Any suggestion made to them is likely to be refused with, 'D'you think I was born in France?' But the men's

ideas are wrong too. They are shocked if they do not have to pay for love."

As the day grew hotter, we began to inquire of fishermen, or washer-women kneeling on a raft anchored under one of the stilt houses, "How many hours is it to Avenal?"

According to the optimism or pessimism of the respondent, it was "One little hour, even less", or "You have still many hours", with an upward stretching of the neck which suggested distance.

There was more conversation. "In prosperous times, all Ecuadorians who could afford it lived abroad. It was considered a disgrace to live in the country, but nowadays landlords are forced to return to their estates."

Slit-eyed, yellow-skinned men passed us in canoes hollowed out of trunks.

"Yes, there was Mongol blood on the coast. Did they sail, originally, from China? If so, their descendants have forgotten their seamanship. The fishermen are so lazy they only catch enough to feed themselves. It's rare that you can buy fish more than once a month. The niggers congregate in certain districts. There's a black colony in Manta which doesn't pay any attention to the Government. That's a bad province. In Manta, and near here too, in Vinces, you'll need a revolver. Nigger blood fights. The men wear long red ponchos, and if you step on one of them, you're for it! Round Cuenca, there are a lot of murders—you'll see crosses all over the place—but generally Ecuadorians are too lazy to kill, even during revolutions. That's a growing industry. Lots of people are more or less permanently engaged in revolution."

At Avenal no launch was waiting. The weary paddlers were forced to continue down-stream, but the current sweeping up the estuary was beginning to affect the tributary into which flowed the Chojampe. Progress was slow, in spite of the magnificent efforts of the two young men who represented town and country, but a country continually contrasted with Paris. After another two hours we were asking, "How many *turns* is it to the big river?" Dusk was falling and there seemed to be even less certainty about our destination.

In semi-darkness, we glided into the Guayas and took council as to where we should sleep. It happened that neither of the men possessed relations among the 'hacenderos' in that particular district. But a large wooden house loomed over flowering shrubs. Cattle could be distinguished in the pastures bordered by jungle. Following the custom of the country, we asked for hospitality, and received it in full measure. I was shown into a room which contained a double bed, a single bed and a hammock. Shortly afterwards a woman entered with a pile of sheets. I thought it best to explain my desire for solitude.

"But the beautiful señor, is he not your husband?"

"Alas, no," I said.

"The one who smiles, he is, then, your husband?"



1. Rosica Forbes as the "Royal Train" in the tableau "Famous Trains," at Covent Garden. 2. As the ruby, at Lady Mount-Temple's "Jewel Ball," 3. At the Zodiac Ball, designed by Robin D'Erlanger. 4. The McGraths at Mrs. Benjamin Guinness's "Arabian Nights Ball," 5. Before the "Jewel Ball"; Mrs. Claud Leigh, Miss Margaret Whigham, Rosica Forbes, the Hon. Mrs. Baillie Hamilton

#### THE YEAR OF MASQUERADE

1. L.N.A.

2. Edmund Harrington.

3. The Sketch.

4. Leader.

5. Keystone.



From one drawing-  
room into another



My own sitting-room



My own bedroom,  
when sense pre-  
vailed the black and  
green marble floor is  
carpeted in primrose  
yellow

THE HOUSE THAT  
INSISTED ON  
PARTIES

Regretfully, I shook my head.

The woman was puzzled, but she agreed that there were other rooms. I suggested that the spare sheets should be removed.

"Yes, yes," said the woman, picking up some of them. "But do you not wish to sleep with either señor?"

Later, when we were explaining ourselves to our host, who was a dairy-farmer, I realized that being a 'foreigner' excused everything.

"They expect foreigners to be mad," said the young man who had lived in France.

Through Bolivia—by that time at war with Paraguay over a boundary lost in the Chaco swamps, which neither country wanted or could find—I returned to Argentina. On the frontier our train was held up among troops and guns. We were shunted, engineless, into the hills and forgotten. Food came to an end. There was no water. For forty-eight hours our sole occupation was to discuss—in Spanish, Portuguese, French and English—what would happen to us. Then a passing gun-crew gave me a paper. In it I read a diverting account of our predicament. Buenos Aires was said to be much concerned. Something startling would be done to *rescue me*. I was glad to learn this. So was everybody else on the train. For together we had thirsted. Together we were determined to be rescued.

Eventually, an engine arrived. Half starved, we reached Rosario. There the railway-manager's coach waited—in charge of his delightful assistant. I still remember the dinner we ate—or perhaps I ate all of it by myself—on the way to Buenos Aires.

After that, I settled in Montevideo to write my book. The atmosphere was original and therefore suitable. For at the moment, there was fearful eruption in the Andes. An imaginative London daily burned me therein, under a headline, "Rosita Forbes in holocaust of blazing hell". Another, delighted or appalled—I fear the former—spent five pounds on a Transatlantic call. It contrived to connect with the youngest secretary of Embassy in Buenos Aires, where I was spending the week-end for a dance. "Where is Rosita Forbes?" asked a voice from London—intent and grim. For the answer would be *news*—the last I should ever make. The young secretary was unimpressed. "I don't know," he said. "She was in the billiard-room, but I think she's just gone out for a fitting." A gasp greeted his reply. The receiver—in Fleet Street—was slammed down.

Ash from the eruption six hundred miles away drifted after me to Uruguay. I did not know what it was. That afternoon I rode as usual along the miles of flat beach beside the Rio Plate. Hugh Grindley had lent me a big bay which pulled like a steam-engine. He was mounted on a wild little chestnut named 'Lindy' because she was always in the air. We were talking seriously about British trade. I was feeling portentous. For the South American papers, nearing the climax of their interest, had described me as "an ambassador second

only to the Prince of Wales". I did not know whether to be flattered or aggrieved. But I took my opportunities solemnly. All my friends suffered. They were expected to provide constant—and consistent—information.

That afternoon the sun was very bright and the air thin, so that the sand and the dunes tufted with brittle grass, the sea faintly tea-coloured and the pale spears of eucalyptus looked as if they had been bleached. There was a curious whiteness in the atmosphere and my companion's face was white. By degrees we became silent and the horses' hoofs made no sound. The sun was gradually obscured. "Is it a fog?" I asked. My eyelids were stinging. Soon the beach glittered and the sea was phosphorescent. "What is it?" I insisted, for, in the space of an hour, I had seen winter fall. The eucalyptus were covered with hoar frost. Sunlight came palely through a mist. The horses snorted and tossed their heads. It was like riding through powdered sugar. Hugh's face was coated with grey. His hair and eyelashes were white. It was astounding to see all colour drawn slowly out of the landscape. When we reached the woods, every fir looked like a Christmas tree, sparkling with artificial frost. The few peons we passed loped along with heads bent. Their eyes were bloodshot, their skins leaden. Age had fallen upon them like a spell.

In silence we turned back. It was not a time for speech. Distance ceased to exist. It was obscured by an impalpable curtain. Through this, faintly iridescent, a block of buildings or a tower shivered into the sky, its outlines as uncertain as a picture dissolving on a screen. By then we might have been riding through invisible nettles. Standing up in my stirrups, I looked across the summer sands and saw them snowbound as in an Arctic winter. The sea was ice-grey and deadly smooth under the luminous softness. Grass, driftwood, a fishing-net hung across a boat, a deserted cabin, the bushes scrambling up sand-hills—all were silvered in the strange suffused illumination. "It's the end of the world," I said at last. "I am frightened." Hugh laughed at me through the unreal light which no longer came from the sky. It was diffused from sea and sand, and in it we saw the dissolving of familiar dimensions. I felt I should be buried under a million, million impalpable flakes falling out of an empty sky. The ash had travelled sixteen hundred miles from Andene volcanoes in eruption. "You look twenty years older," said Hugh, awed by my whitening hair. "I feel a thousand," I said. My horse's head was drooping. Like me, it was bowed beneath the weight of time. That is the last I remember of South America in 1932.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

1933

### *First Vision of Russia*

WHEN I RETURNED to England, early in 1933, I found everyone concerned with Russia. There had been a good deal of friction which was about to culminate in the hysterically-publicized trial of Mr. Alan Monkhouse and his fellow engineers. Looking back now, it is amazing to realize how governments and newspaper offices encouraged each other to lose their sense of proportion. Their success was complete.

I went to Moscow to see what was happening. An hour before my departure I rang up an eminent official in the F.O. He literally gasped. "Oh, I don't think we can agree to your going," he said as if I were making certain of death—and of additional inconvenience to H.M.'s already harassed Ministers. A leading editor was equally portentous. He said as solemnly as if it were the Day of Judgement, "You will see history made." "Why?" I asked. For it all seemed to me a great deal of pother about very little. Russia was experimenting on the biggest scale in history. She felt herself very much alone. Deprived of her neighbours' sympathy, suspected of atrocities even greater than those she had undoubtedly committed in the first excesses of revolution, she was naturally developing a persecution complex. When she could hit back she did so; but why turn the full flood of international limelight, not on the great things she projected, but on a mistake which, as our nurse used to say when we dropped her treasured possessions, "might have happened to anyone".

I went to Moscow with a party of school-teachers. We started under the wing of the Society for the Improvement of Cultural Relations, of which I was an enthusiastic member until the Soviet Union made its pact with Germany in 1939. Then I resigned.

Our journey in the spring of '33 was uneventful, except in the diversion of character by which I was enchanted. For some of the school-teachers were very red and others were very white. The former were bitterly disappointed, for they expected paradise and were dismayed by the discomforts and hardships inevitable in an experimental stage of evolution. The latter were delighted. For they had expected 'the worst' and found instead an enthusiastic people, bent on creation.

This was very amusing, because within a week everybody had changed their ideas and were arguing from a different point of view. But by this time most of the teachers were very tired of me. They liked being taken about to see the sights—human and material. With



infinite patience, they waited for information and listened avidly to set pieces which were no doubt true. But I preferred wandering about on my own and picking up all sorts of stray friends with whom I could speak a common language. A young Spanish anarchist, who objected to the lack of blood in his own country's revolutions, was very kind to me. He introduced me to many interesting people—artisans, students, lawyers and doctors who spoke German or some Latin language. With these I had great fun and heard a lot about the new Russia. For all the young people talked with the utmost frankness. It seemed to me they never ceased talking, by night or by day. I remember a typical conversation with a fair-haired student in Leningrad. We were walking along the Neva, beside the palaces which had been turned into institutions. On the opposite bank a pale sun gilded the spire of Peter and Paul, the Czarist prison where an earnest young woman, who had given the signal for the assassination of Alexander, had been condemned to a lifetime of solitary confinement.

It happened that I glanced up at an eighteenth-century façade. On the fourth floor a peasant with a red handkerchief bound over her head was standing precariously upon a sill. "So you have woman window-cleaners in Leningrad?" I said.

"Why not? Don't you believe in equality?" My companion was faintly mocking. She evidently regarded me as a barbarian, startled by the complex evidences of civilization; but she was only too ready to explain. In revolutionary Russia, that embryo of the Workers' state which had existed in subterranean fashion beneath the autocracy of classes now satisfactorily 'liquidated', men and women had worked together under the same banner, "The Land for the People, the Factories for the Workers, the Power for the Soviets". They had taken the same risks. Together they had been banished to Siberia or ranged against a wall and shot.

"We are their spiritual descendants," said the girl, tossing back her short, straight hair. "We're just carrying on their job, men and women together. We haven't time to bother about sex; we haven't time for much except work and keeping abreast of the Plan, but that isn't going to last. Soon, we hope, two or three hours' labour a day will be sufficient to give us all we need."

I glanced at the speaker. She was pale from under-nourishment and a winter behind sealed windows. Her coat was thick but shabby; her shoes lamentable. There were lines of strain under her eyes, but she was intensely purposeful. The whole of her body expressed her conviction that life, difficult as it was and shorn of youth's normal prerogatives, was infinitely worth while.

Her bare, reddened hands clenched under the ill-fitting sleeves as she exclaimed, "Don't you realize what's happening in Russia? We're making something permanent and stable, while all the rest of the world is at cross-purposes."

I said, "But how long can you go on at this terrific pressure? Don't you want comfort, amusement, freedom?"

She replied, "We're not so keen as you are on individual freedom. We've got a dictatorship. We know it and we don't mind because the State does really belong to us—even the man who runs it gets no bigger salary than a dozen engineers I know." She must have seen my surprise, for she continued, "There's nothing left for us to envy, because we're all equal. My people are peasants. I'd never have had a chance beyond the pigsty, if it hadn't been for the Soviet. Now I'm educated, and I'm studying to be a lawyer." She spoke with pride and, like everyone else in Russia, she went on talking—impetuously, largely, the words falling over each other. She was married, but she wasn't going to have any children yet, because she didn't know if she was going to stay with her present husband. He was lazy. She thought she'd probably register a divorce, as soon as she could make arrangements about another room; but all through the torrent of her conversation, I gathered that her personal affairs ranked second to 'the Revolution'.

"Do you ever talk about anything else?" I asked at last, after hearing this clear-eyed firebrand acknowledge most of the defects in the new social system. Nobody got quite enough to eat. Transport was sadly lacking, so that many workers had to waste an hour morning and evening getting to and from their factories. The supply of clothes and household goods purchasable in the Co-operative shops was altogether inadequate, and prices in the free market were frankly impossible. But these conditions were temporary. They would be remedied.

My companion laughed. "You don't understand us at all," she said. "Why, my sister's just got married and she's madly in love, but last night she and her husband forgot to go to bed at all. They were discussing the Second Five Years' Plan."

She looked at me with expectant malice. "You don't believe that, do you?"

It seemed a good moment to discuss the sex revolution. "How important are your marriages, and have you any family life at all?" I asked.

"I expect it's not very different from any other country, except that we never make love in public. You won't see young people kissing in the parks. We leave that to Europe and America."

"But you have so little privacy."

"Perhaps, for that reason, we have so little love." The girl frowned. "We take it more naturally than you do. If we can get a room, we marry. It only means signing a book at Zags (the marriage and divorce bureau) on the way to work."

"And if you can't get a room?"

"Most of us wait. There isn't much opportunity to do otherwise,"

she added. "Of course, the peasants always marry. They wouldn't feel respectable otherwise."

"And you?"

"We're too busy to bother about respectability. What a fuss you make about marriage, anyway. We think it's convenient if we want to have children, but otherwise, what can it matter?"

From such talks I used to go back to the three English teachers with whom I had made friends. One was Anna Newman, a Lincolnshire woman and a Conservative, quite the best traveller I have ever met. She was most sensibly prepared for the grimmest eventualities and—as they did not materialize—she proved of inestimable value to us all. For she fed us on her own biscuits, butter, tea and chocolate when—as often happened—we were hungry. She ministered to us when we developed colds and coughs and were unable to buy the usual remedies because we had no coupons—or whatever they were called ten years ago in Russia—issued by a union. She saved us from bugs in the trains and lice when I lured my special adherents off the beaten track into hospitable but unwashed attics or dock cellars.

Another equally undaunted and delightful woman—a Liberal I think—we nicknamed 'Pash', and as such she remains in my heart. She was a dear, and she saw everybody's point of view without too much concern for its effect on her own.

The third was a sister of Raymond Postgate and of the brilliant writer, Mrs. Cole. She was extremely 'left' in her politics, and could with difficulty be dissuaded from wearing a quantity of revolutionary badges—manacled hands, broken chains and so forth—upon her lapels. She was young, honest and delightful. I liked her enormously, partly because she had the loveliest slim feet and ankles, partly because her frankness amounted to inspiration. She found in Russia exactly what she needed—a delightfully unselfconscious relationship with her contemporaries of both sexes. She would have fitted into the Soviet system without much difficulty, finding in a multiplicity of friendships sufficient reward for harder work and harder living than she had known at home.

With these three, I saw the new, vivid, experimental civilization of the Soviet expressed in clinics, schools and factories, clubs and cultural institutes. This was what we were expected to see, and so far as it went it was good. What I thought pathetic was the conviction of the people concerned that it was much better than anything else in the world. For in those days young Russians were well informed about their own country, but knew nothing whatsoever about any other. This led to great arguments. My new acquaintances were desperately anxious to be approved and appreciated. They deserved it. For they worked, year in year out, as no other nation would have agreed to do, but their complete disbelief in the existence of any other form of civilization was irritating. They would not believe that British workers were not starv-

ing, or that 'Capitalists' did not maintain their iniquitous position with machine-guns. I have never met anyone more friendly than the young engineers, the doctors, judges, communal cooks, artisans and truck-drivers with more and more of whom I made acquaintance when I left the shepherded scholastic delegation. They took me everywhere I wanted to go, to prisons as well as to mills and factories, to the 'slums' on the river docks as well as to the fine new communal flats and lodging-houses. But they would not believe anything I told them about England. This I found very trying. I used to get cross and they used to laugh at me.

In the company of a broken-toothed Caucasian with the sort of face which attracts children and dogs, I watched several cases in a People's Court in Leningrad. My companion had worked in a factory until 1919. Since then he had been a judge, but he had only just begun to study law. He wore the black cotton blouse of a worker, and he knew all about his fellow-men.

We saw the manager of a State bakery tried for negligence. Two thousand kilos of bread had disappeared. The man pleaded that he was overworked. He had only one assistant. The queue had crowded into his shop. He had neither time nor space to see what was happening.

Eventually the baker acknowledged that he had not been very efficient, and he was sentenced to a year's compulsory labour. This meant that he would continue his ordinary work, paying a percentage of his wages to the State.

In Moscow, at the Frunzensky District Court, I saw the trial of a girl who refused legal aid and pleaded guilty to killing her parents while they slept because they had refused to give her new husband lodging in their flat.

She was twenty-five, a factory worker, and pretty. She stood in front of a tired, pale woman judge, her shawl thrown back, her cheap pink blouse held together with a badge of merit from some cultural club, and repeated, "I was afraid I'd lose him if I couldn't get him a room."

The judge was patient. She examined every possible circumstance in favour of the accused, but the girl could only think of her husband. "He hadn't got a room. I didn't see why *they* (her parents) shouldn't take us in. I oughtn't to've done it, but we had to have a room."

The sentence, informally discussed with the accused, was eight years' confinement, which would automatically be reduced by half if the girl worked well in the prison factory. The last thing she said to the judge was, "He won't wait for me."

The senior of seven lawyers employed by the Soviet of All Trades Unions, a capable, intelligent woman who nevertheless looked like a 'char', remarked, "How could she expect him to wait four years? He's probably registered his divorce already."

"In England," I said, "that girl would have been hanged." The

lawyer looked at me as if I were a barbarian. "In Russia we are too civilized to give a death sentence for that sort of crime," she reproved me.

I saw stealers of bread-tickets most sensibly admonished before being sentenced to a few months' compulsory labour. I saw a youth who denied the paternity of a child told to have a good look at it and remember that his word of honour was the most precious thing he possessed. I saw a man condemned to the extreme penalty of eighteen years' imprisonment for the 'bourgeois crime' of marketing a woman's honour. I listened while a young man was accused of ill-treating the girl with whom he lived and who had just borne his child.

It was abundantly proved, however, that she had tried to throw vitriol at him. He had seized her wrists, and in the ensuing struggle some of the acid had spilled over her neck. The boy was therefore acquitted on the charge of assault, but ordered to pay a third of his salary for the support of his child until it was eighteen.

For in Soviet Russia they might marry (or not marry) and divorce as they chose, but mother and father were equally responsible for the children. According to their earnings they contributed, and the law made sure they did so.

In fact the law as propounded in the People's Courts seemed to me fair and friendly and amazingly reasonable. Many delinquents who would have been sentenced in England got away with a good wiggling and the injunction to remember their responsibility towards the "toiling masses of the Revolution".

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

1933

### *The British Engineers' Trial in Moscow. Finland and Field-Marshal Mannerheim*

FROM JUST UNDER the judges' dais, I watched the trial of the British engineers. On one side of me an American muttered, "If they don't spill the beans now, I guess they'll go cold on 'em!"

On the other a Frenchman cursed the reticence of Anglo-Saxons. "Why don't they speak? All the world is ready to help them!"

So the hall waited, tense with expectation. Kutusova<sup>1</sup> shook her blonde head in the face of her judges and told them to go to the devil. If she wanted to ride in a car and use cosmetics and love any number of foreigners, she'd most assuredly do it, and it was no business of theirs!

The other Russian prisoners wallowed in the depths of their real

<sup>1</sup> Alleged to be the mistress of one of the accused engineers.

or imaginary guilt. I felt that if there was anything more they could possibly confess they would revel in so doing.

At the judges' table the German, Martens, was frankly bored. He had seen so many trials; he knew how they all ended. Beside him Ulrich's round, common little face popped up and down as he moved restlessly in his chair, laughing at his own jokes, shifting the papers at which he never looked.

Only the expert of the Metal Trust, Dimitriev, appeared to be intent on the trial. His long fingers were clasped and still. He leaned forward, his strong, dark hair swept back from the face of a Loyola. "That man is sincere," I thought.

So was Vishinsky, the Prosecutor, to whom the evidence had presumably been presented when it all neatly dovetailed. I could see his irritation growing as he bent over the 'confessions', which were alternately denied and confirmed.

But the engineers, having so long served Russia, could not believe their last links with her were broken. They would say nothing that could jeopardize their future relations with the Soviet.

"*Mon Dieu*," muttered the Frenchman, tearing at his beard, "shall we never know the truth?"

"Don't we know it?" I suggested. It seemed to me so clear. . . . Half a dozen Englishmen intent on their specialized jobs, engineering and production their chief topics of conversation, because they had no interests outside their work; a Russia hard-driven by the Five Year Plan so that a certain amount of wrecking by the exhausted or the half-hearted became inevitable; isolated OGPU agents told that they had got to stop it; the arrest of Cusev, whose lifelong sympathies appear to have been 'white'.

Then there is a snowball of confessions, each one implicating somebody else, until it is reasonable to assume that the police thought they had, if not an unblemished case, at least a possible one.

Monkhouse and his immediate associates were above reproach. Consequently no confession could be extracted from them. They denied everything and went on doing so. With reason they were acquitted. I believe this would have happened without any of the fuss which grew to such extraordinary proportions that every incident was reported and exaggerated.

I had no chance of getting a legitimate ticket for the trial, so I slipped in on a Russian woman's card. It happened to be a dull moment and the European reporters, needing copy, cabled full reports of my appearance. They even described the old tweeds and Cording boots I wore. So the 'three-letter' police heard what I had been doing. A polite G.P.U. officer called at my hotel, but his questions were reasonable. At the end of them, I asked if I could visit the Lubianka. In this political prison, the cheerful haphazard Russia I had hitherto seen was nowhere apparent. Instead, there was ruthless efficiency and discip-

line, with a smartness reminiscent of Germany under the Junkers. I was much impressed. In conversation with three G.P.U. officers, I was told, "We gave up torture, because we found it useless. It induced immediate confessions which had no truth in them at all. Torture is complete waste of time. Our difficulty is not to get confessions, but to stop them! The average person who is brought in here is ready to confess to anything before he crosses the threshold. Most of our work is done by the imagination of the accused."

I looked at the alert khaki-clad figures, meticulously groomed and shaved, their scarlet hats at the right angle, their eyes keen and assured.

One of them said, "Certain types of people will not speak. We know within the hour and we do not waste time on them." Another continued, "Russians are by nature a soft race. Communism is putting something hard and strong into them. You will never get a Party member to speak. You can kill him, but you will not get a sound out of him."

The Soviet Union inherited her political police, the OGPU, from the Czars. I do not know how necessary they are to the new system which, at great cost, has undoubtedly done a great deal for Russia and without which the country could not, I think, fight as she is doing to-day. During various nights in different industrial towns—for it seems to me Russians never go to bed if they have a chance of talking instead—I discussed the OGPU with students, clerks and artisans. They agreed that the secret police might be responsible for as many as three thousand arrests in a month—in 'bad times'—but they insisted that shootings were decreasing every year. "When we have no longer any enemies in our own country, we shall be able to do without the G.P.U.," they said. But there was still a good deal of fear. Some were afraid of sabotage, of interference by foreign powers and of budding 'capitalists' within their own laborious system. This they knew was much tried by ignorance, intolerance, overwork and the need for compressing into a few years the development logical to a century. Others were afraid of persecution—of being proscribed as bourgeois, put on the black list and deprived of their papers. In 1933 if this happened they could hope for neither food, work nor lodging. But it must be remembered that ten years ago the Soviet system felt itself at the mercy of a critical and often hostile world.

Constantly, I am asked, "What is Russia really like?" This generic question is particularly popular to-day while the Soviet Union fights so splendidly against the Axis. How could any human being answer it with exactitude? For each person sees only a fraction of Russia, and most see only the good or the bad on which he is already determined. This, at least, I did not do. For I went to the Soviet Union with no preconceived ideas. I was prepared to be impressed or disturbed according to what I saw with my own experienced eyes. For by that time I had spent fifteen years in travelling. I had seen many peoples, lived among them and with them as much as possible,

talked with their leaders and learned their ideals or ideas. So I was not a bad judge of conditions and possibilities, especially as I was hampered by no politics or ambitions. I had nothing to lose or to gain.

First of all, I was much impressed by the friendliness of the people. Peasants and townfolk were equally helpful. They were always most anxious to show what they were doing. Often they thought it much better than it really was in comparison with the rest of the world, but that did not bother me. Within a few hours of our arrival in the first industrial town I was happily convinced that there was no need to be officially shepherded. While the others waited for a guide, I went out into the busy streets. In the first tram I found amused and pleased acquaintances. They were laundresses, and they took me to the eating-place belonging to their plant. There I met an electrician who spoke French. He introduced me to some engineers. So it went on. Within a week, I had many friends among the workers and I was moved by their intense enthusiasm. This seemed to me the biggest achievement of the new régime. Sovietism had given the people so splendid a purpose that it amounted to a religion. It was creative and it was peaceful. Unlike the Nazis in Germany who were soon preparing to conquer a continent, Russian workers had no thought of dominating other countries. They were, naturally, intolerant and ignorant of any but their own ways, but they did not want to force them on other people. One and all, they imagined they were creating the model for future civilization. They expected the rest of the world would realize this in time and accept the Russian design for living. The extremists among Party members, of whom I met a few, were interested in the possibility of helping revolution among workers in other countries, but certainly not by means of armies of occupation. I do not like generalizing about any country, and certainly not about a federation of peoples numbering more than 180 millions in states of development ranging from the tent-dwelling nomads of Central Asia—hunting with tame eagles, drinking fermented mare's milk out of gourds—and the polyglot young scientists pouring into modernized industry from the new universities. But I feel that the Soviet system has done three obvious things for the vast lands through which it is gradually percolating. It has put money in its proper place. For in Russia it is no longer a means of political or industrial power. It is no more than an instrument for making those purchases allowed to each type of worker. They are limited by the small production of 'consumers' goods' and also by the quality of individual labour.

It has given the ordinary people a feeling of complete equality so that they do not mind excessive discomfort and hardship. For they feel they are no worse off than anyone else. There is nothing to make them envious or bitter. They have as good a chance as anyone else of achieving the emoluments and ease attendant upon Party office or success in art, science, invention or technical labour. Russians, it



seemed to me, worked far longer hours than any other people could endure and went on working half-way through the night, voluntarily, in clubs and houses of culture, in order to inform themselves or others about the progress of the various Plans.

The third and most impressive achievement of Bolshevism was, as I have said, a unity of inspiration which tided gallant and still enthusiastic young people over twenty hard years. Only in war could English workers, I think, endure such lack of pleasure, comfort and convenience as I saw in 1933 in Russia. For on the other side of the ledger, it must be confessed, there was a good deal to counter-balance spiritual and material evolution. Religion had been made unfashionable. It had not wholly disappeared. Most Sundays I went to church. There was no interference with the congregations, provided they could maintain their own churches and support their own priests. Any of the latter who indulged in anti-Soviet politics were shot. Disused churches were turned into warehouses. An 'Anti-God' newspaper mocked at Faith, and gradually among the young people it became as unfashionable as idleness. Family life as we know it inevitably disappeared—with leisure and domestic service. For with both parents working as a matter of course—and of necessity, for without work there would be neither food nor lodging—the children had to be placed in communal crèches and kindergartens before they reached school age. With home life went the tyranny of domestic labour. No Russian girl I met would have welcomed the idea of devoting her life to cooking, cleaning, mending and looking after children. Here the Soviet Union was entirely different from Nazi Germany. Russian women were encouraged, indeed very sensibly compelled, to work and live as partners of men in the mighty purpose of human and material development.

In 1933, the lodging crisis was perhaps at its height. Millions of peasants had been swept into the new and still growing industries. Building in the towns was on a gigantic scale, but it could not keep pace with factory development. Consequently, families were often forced to share a single room. Sometimes I found three or four households squeezed into a small flat. But such conditions were temporary. So, I imagine, was the lack of amusement or purposeless diversion. There was organized sport for exercise, but I met no Russians who looked upon games as unimportant fun. I saw no films that were just entertainments. They were all technical, historical or in some way propagandist. The same applied to newspapers, books and the wireless. The latter was perpetual. Nobody thought of turning it off. They could not sleep without the familiar lectures, reports and instructions issuing from a loudspeaker. Russia, as I saw it on that first journey round the industrial cities of the North, was serious and earnest. I can most easily describe its superficial appearance as being very like our own country in war-time. There were the same endless queues for every conceivable object—food, clothing, cigarettes, transport, news-

papers and so on. But I do not remember policemen being necessary to organize the queues. There was the same dreary and shabby clothing, with patched stockings and split or mended boots. There were broken arches from too much standing and waiting. There was 'practically nothing' to buy in the shops—this phrase, of course, is always comparative. But I found busts of Lenin and Stalin far easier to acquire than cooking-pots or shoe-laces. There were coupons as in war-time Britain. Food was limited and monotonous. The organized workers got fairly plentiful—but tasteless—meals. The older people, struggling to live at home, went very hungry indeed. The trains and trams were fantastically overcrowded. There was no private transport. The people in the streets looked grim, patient and enduring. They certainly did not look joyous—and there was considerable fear of breaking the endless mass of regulations. I remember I wanted to give my railway rug and some soap to a girl clerk with whom I had made friends. She dared not come into the hotel to get them. So we met mysteriously in pitch darkness in the middle of a public garden. There I handed over to my frankly terrified friend the means of warmth and cleanliness. So, I imagine, in war England the fearful illegitimately effect those small, domestic exchanges upon which the authorities frown. In any case, the best way to visualize Russia in the process of evolution into the strong, hard, self-sufficient nation of to-day, is to realize that since 1918 she has undergone all the discomforts, hardships and difficulties which we attribute to the present war.

The last impression I have is of Moscow in the spring of '33. I went to a great Easter service. The crowd overflowed into the street. From the edge of the pavement where I stood, close-pressed as prune mould, I could just see the high altar blazing with gold and jewels, the vestments of the officiating priests, and the incense like a pale lilac mist. Into my ribs a sharp elbow was pressed. It belonged to an army officer—a woman, grey-haired, smart and deeply lined. We walked away from the service together. She could speak German, so we talked of many things as we picked our way through melting snow. At last I asked her, "If there is another war, what will you be fighting for—Communism or Russia?" She thought for a long time before she replied. At last she said, "We work for the Soviet system. But if it comes to another war, every one of us—man, woman and child, reactionary and revolutionary—will fight for holy Russia—our motherland."

I left the Soviet Union by way of Finland. It must be confessed that it was a comfort to get back to plentiful food and no stringent regulations. I had been immensely impressed by the force and courage of all the young Russians I met. At times I felt as if I were living among the early Christians persecuted in Judea. The discomfort and the spiritual enthusiasm were as great. All my heart was with the gallant young workers, wearing themselves to bits for so vast a creed,

but my flesh was weak. It was delightful to be really clean and cherished in Helsingfors. While I was enjoying the number of taps in my bathroom, the British Minister's wife telephoned to my hotel, "You *must* come to lunch. You'll meet the last of the Vikings." "I've no clothes," I retorted, "and I don't know that I'll have time between baths." I was determined, after grim weeks without hot water, to make the most of all that Finnish plumbing offered.

"Nonsense," retorted the hospitable voice. "You must need feeding up. I've ordered extra helpings for you—and besides, it's Mannerheim!"

I could not resist a talk with this man, leader of a peasant people completely socialist, among whom there is neither wealth nor extreme poverty. So, in a dilapidated tweed, I arrived at the Legation, prepared to feel out of place.

But the Field-Marshal asked a great many questions about Russia, showing, of course, how well he already knew the country. Soon we were discussing the possibility of 'war in any direction'.

"Finland," said a banker, "is something of a Naboth's vineyard. Russia is always terrified that she'll be attacked by way of the Baltic, so she'd like to hold both sides of our gulf."

"I doubt if she'd make war to get them——" began a minister.

"Why not?" retorted a Frenchman. "She needs advanced air and sea bases. Helsinki and Reval would make excellent sentries at the gates of Leningrad."

The Field-Marshal, who had already fought one war against Russia, said, "The Soviet will probably try to achieve those sentry-boxes you talk about by guile or—if propaganda fails—by direct negotiations. Of course, if we once give them a foothold inside our country, it is finished!"

"Do you think the Russians have a good army?" I asked, and I told of the enormous and effective parades I had seen.

"They have excellent fighting material," said the Finnish Marshal, "if they know how to use it. This they will soon learn."

This conversation took place ten years ago, but the Field-Marshal's summing-up of the situation has proved correct. Sitting straight but not stiff in an armchair, his strong, deeply-lined face dull in the light, his eyes, a little narrowed under carved lids, looking out of the window to the water and the melting snow, he said, "The Russian soldier is a good fighter, if he has any chance at all. He can endure almost as much as a Chinese."

I said, "I don't believe the people in Russia would want to fight the Finns."

The Field-Marshal replied, "In these days when life for the majority is comfortable and full of pleasant opportunity, I doubt if any people ever want to fight a war of aggression. It is much too inconvenient for them. It upsets their daily lives, and their wives object."

The Field-Marshal smiled. He has the face of a typical soldier, clear-cut and quiet. There is nothing indefinite about him. He expresses himself clearly, using words as good tools which he respects. "Ten miles from our frontiers, most of the villagers are as ignorant of our life as of Buddhism in Central Asia. They are told we are starving, and that our factories and shops are closed. They probably imagine we should welcome a Red invasion," continued the Finn. "Dealing with Russia as a people is impossible, because nothing gets through to the ordinary man. With the utmost sincerity he believes in a world which does not exist at all. If a company of Russian soldiers could be dropped suddenly into the middle of one of our prosperous country towns, they would probably be too surprised to fight. They would set about eating instead."

I told the Field-Marshal of the greed which travellers from Leningrad displayed the instant they crossed the frontier. "We all made a rush for the milk and the stuffed rolls. I've never eaten so much in my life. Even the waitress hesitated to bring me more cream. In Russia everything tastes the same—meat, fish and vegetables. It was heavenly enjoying food again after weeks of just stoking."

The Field-Marshal laughed and offered me the cheese biscuits. "Don't waste a moment," he said.

"What a magnificent man!" said one of the guests as the Finn took his leave, after inviting me to see his house by the sea. Everybody agreed. "He's unique," said the Minister.

It was a Sunday when we got back to England. We landed at Harwich and bought all the popular newspapers. In a third-class carriage on the way to London, Anna Newman, 'Pash' and I read them with the same dismay. Somebody had invented artificial fingernails. These were accorded a headline. A harassed harlot had put her head into a gas-oven. An unpleasant young man had murdered his girl-friend. The rest of the front pages were concerned with the vehement and witty personalities in which rival politicians had been indulging, a divorce and a novel banned because of its farmyard enjoyment of sex. Across the pages, I caught Anna's eyes. She made a helpless gesture as if asking, "Is it real? Or am I reading all this nonsense in a nightmare?" I could not answer, for I was considerably shaken. In Russia the newspapers chronicled only important facts—the building of a dam, agricultural experiments, the progress of education, defence plans, new developments in industry, a wonderful ballet or a scientific invention. I had grown accustomed to a serious view of life and to labour being far more important than pleasure. On that bright Sunday morning, back in England, reading a gossip-writer on the subject of the still bright young things and their parties, I felt as Mr. Harold Macmillan after several hours' conversation with General de Gaulle upon a North African bathing beach—"Either he is mad, or I am. I wish I could be sure which!"

## CHAPTER XXXIX

1933

### *Eleventh Hour in Germany. First Version of Hitler. Comment in Liverpool*

IN THAT MAY of 1933 I found everyone turning to Germany. Hitler was slowly and surely coming into power on the flood tide of his countrymen's bitterness. It was the eleventh hour. Ramsay MacDonald, Brüning, Tardieu and the representative of Fascist Italy had met at Geneva. The German statesman had been completely frank. He knew that if he returned to Berlin empty-handed, it would be the end of Socialist Germany. He reminded the British Prime Minister that in 1919 the Reich had swung vigorously to the left. The people were sick of war. All they wanted was food and employment. They got neither. Surrounded by armed enemies, they became more and more impressed by their own insecurity. Words did them no good. Again and again Socialists of the Weimar Republic asked for the minor concessions which would have established their authority and restored the self-respect of defeated Germany. Britain would have agreed, but France refused. For fifteen years, France had made a lasting European peace impossible. For she would not realize that eighty million desperately miserable and discontented people in the very heart of Europe were as a dangerous disease by which the whole continent would be infected.

At that last conference, when the other Allied delegates were ready to concede the little that Chancellor Brüning asked, Tardieu would not listen to reason. On the contrary, with no warning to his colleagues, he went back to Paris. Obstinacy could go no further. Hitler's election was made certain.

In June of that year, I flew to Berlin to see the new German Chancellor. On the crest of a new generation's resentment he had been borne into power. Fifteen years had passed since the last war ended. The young men who wore brown shirts and marched about giving the Roman salute had had nothing to do with the Kaiser's perfidy. They were influenced, certainly, by Frederick the Great and Bismarck. With such men's philosophy of force they were stuffed like Strasburg geese. But what they really wanted was *something to do*. Least of all peoples can the Germans bear idleness, and this had been forced upon them by their isolation in the middle of a terrified or indifferent Europe. It is no use trying to understand the hurricane of Nazism which, in its appalling violence, has done more evil than the forces loosed by Attila or Genghis Khan in the era of simple savagery, unless the contributing factors are appreciated. When I was small, my

governess used to read me at least once a week my favourite story from Roman history. I have forgotten names and details, but it concerned a victorious general who did not know what to do with the enemies he had defeated. He sent a messenger to ask the advice of his old father who was a farmer. The answer came, "Kill all the captives." The Roman general sent another messenger, asking for confirmation of such terrible advice. This time, the reply came, "Set them all free. Let them return with gifts to their own homes." Convinced of his father's wisdom, but understanding nothing, the conqueror despatched still another horseman to elucidate the conflicting messages. The old farmer brought the desired explanation in person. He said, "My son, there are only two choices open to you. Exterminate the race of your enemies. Thus you will never have another war. Or make friends with them. Thus you will have no war while the memory of your generosity is handed down from one generation to another. If you do neither of these things, there will be another war as soon as the sons of the men you have defeated grow old enough to avenge their fathers." The advice was sound, but the victorious general ignored it. He dragged his captives through the humiliation of a Roman triumph. The land he had defeated was pin-pricked into new vigour by the exigencies of Rome. Within ten years it took its revenge.

I thought of this tale as I flew to Berlin in June, 1933. I wondered if it was too late to benefit by the advice of an ancient Roman farmer, wise in his own generation. The air was very bumpy and I had a bad headache when I arrived at the Adlon Hotel. So I went to bed. Hitler and the problems of his disillusioned country—already a trifle intoxicated by the violence of historical Prussianism and modern Communism—could wait till the morrow.

As I drowsed, the telephone shrilled. Into my ear Allen Graves spoke urgently. "You must get up at once and come to supper. Hanfstängel will be here."

"I don't know him," I said. Probably I added, "I don't want to know him." For I could not have been more inert.

But Allen insisted. "He can take you to see the Chancellor. He is the pet of the moment. He plays Hitler to sleep." So it went on. I had no alternative but to re-dress and drive out to Dalem, where Rilu and Allen Graves had a delicious Red Riding-Hood house among tall pine trees. Instead of a wolf, there was a very fat black spaniel.

An enormous young man spread over the piano—and the party. He was a fine musician and he played well into the night before Allen succeeded in isolating him upon a sofa beside me. Then I had to put myself out. It took a lot of effort to persuade Herr Hanfstängel that I must see the new Chancellor next morning before he went away by 'plane to Silesia. "Why should you see him so hurriedly?" repeated the large, spreading young man who must, I suppose, have had some qualities, but I do not remember what they were, nor can I now

recollect more than a general impression of size devoid of muscle.

There was, of course, no reason why I should see Hitler, but I did not confide this to the young pianist. On the contrary, I succeeded in impressing him to the extent of altering all his plans. Returning me to the hotel in a taxi scarcely large enough for his ideas, he instructed me to be ready by ten next morning.

So it happened that I met Hitler, but he was a very different man ten years ago. At that time he may still have hoped for an alliance with England. I do not know. I do not expect anybody really knows. For Hitler has changed with the horrors he has perpetrated and the successes he has achieved. Only historians of another generation will be able to judge the man's character correctly and decide how far he is responsible for the crimes committed in his name. I can only record the things he said. Perhaps he was putting on an act. Perhaps he really felt shy. In those first days of his power, he was certainly not assured. He was, I think, a mystic, obsessed by his belief in himself as an instrument destined to save Germany at the expense, if necessary, of the rest of the world. It may be that he was, to a certain extent, the tool of big business or the High Command, but I doubt it. I think Germany had reached the state of outraged despair when she thought neither reason nor labour nor honesty could help her. So she was ready to try anything. The wilder and the more outrageous the doctrine, the more hopeful it sounded to the depressed young people who had no work and therefore no future.

On that June day, the new Chancellor received me seated behind an enormous desk. He was drawing small, architecturally correct houses on a sheet of blotting-paper.

Looking up, he said, without introduction, "I do hate destruction."

Presumably he was thinking of the old buildings round the Tiergarten which as an artist he admired, but whose demolition—as a realist—he already contemplated.

Herr Hanfstängel and I sat on the other side of the desk, and at intervals Hitler altered or added to his drawings while he talked.

"It is happiness," said Adolf Hitler, "that I want for Germany. I would like to put men back on to the land and women back into the home. It is not necessary that life should be so complicated. We can do with much less than we have been taught to require, but we must have something."

"That 'something' is what I will give to Germany—self-respect first, confidence and security and a little money, a little comfort and of course health."

Outside the door of the Chancellor's study stood two magnificent specimens of his Personal Bodyguard. They measured well over six feet, and when they raised their arms in the Roman salute, they might have been acknowledging the plaudits of an arena.

There was a bronzed young secretary who ought to have been a

gladiator. Consequently, my first impression of the new Germany which revolved round Adolf Hitler was one of youth and health. In a modern room, panelled with squares of unpolished African mahogany, we discussed civilization and the simple life, war, women, and the monarchy.

"I have heard you called the Moloch of culture," I said when I realized that the Chancellor appreciated frankness.

"It is possible to have too much culture. So many of the more advertised writers put reason before instinct. That is wrong. We Nazis appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect.

"There is a child in every grown-up person, and to that child we appeal, with music, flags, oratory and all the other symbols which it understands. We have thought with our heads too long. Now we must feel with our hearts."

Hitler had intelligent blue eyes and a simple manner. A wisp of brown hair fell across his forehead, but he was unconscious of it.

In a few words, without gestures or any unnecessary movement, he tried to express the spirit of Nazism as he saw it *THEN*.

"Nationalism and Socialism are great ideas. It is by the combination of the two that Germany will be re-created. In true Socialism there is no class distinction. All Nazis are brothers. Among them there is no privilege or prejudice. We believe in complete equality between all Germans.

"National Socialism," he said, "is directly opposed to Communism because it is against class warfare. We are pacifist in the broadest sense of the word because we want peace between classes as well as nations."

In the quiet, brown room the only ornament was a bust of Hindenburg. Hitler glanced at it as he said, "I do not want war. None of us wants war. But pacifism, if it is carried too far, becomes the most abject form of defeatism. Germany was obsessed by the fact that she had lost the war. She had no spirit left.

"She was a nation defeated spiritually as well as materially, and as such she could play no part in the reconstruction of Europe."

Hitler continued, "The Nazis are restoring the honour of Germany. They are teaching the people to hold up their heads again. We do not want revenge, but we want self-respect. Compare the situation in Europe with a business deal. Character is as important in a nation as in a man.

"You would not want as a partner anybody who was not strong and self-reliant.

"It should be the same thing at Geneva. No nation can be of use to its fellows unless it is well organized and internally secure. The re-creation of Germany promises peace not war in Central Europe."

There was a pause.

It seemed to me that, in the Chancellor's mind, German obligations



to *Germany* would take precedence of German obligations to the rest of the world. For, like the majority of his compatriots, Adolf Hitler finds it impossible to comprehend foreign points of view.

"Everywhere," I said, "I see men drilling."

Hitler smiled. "Most countries dislike soldiering. Drilling seems to them a childish waste of time, but the German loves a uniform. He likes to be part of a disciplined mass striving for a definite purpose."

"All he wants is to obey orders and to feel himself strongly governed. Consequently, National Socialism, appealing as it does to the strongest instincts of the ordinary man, must bear an aspect of militarization."

"The German feels bigger and happier, more efficient and more sure of himself if he wears a uniform."

I said, "Emil Ludwig told Stalin that the German loves order more than freedom."

"Freedom," said the Chancellor, "is something of a fantasy. If you have a crowd of people getting in each other's way in a small space what use is freedom to them? Order is much more important."

"Freedom, to my mind, means a sensible and purposeful collaboration."

"Democracy is failing all over the world because it sacrifices common sense, duty and honour to the will-o'-the-wisp of freedom."

"The Nazis have been accused of every form of violence, but they themselves have suffered more injuries than they have inflicted."

"In recent years my Party has lost over 300 dead and 12,000 wounded or injured. I had to open a special insurance department at the Brown House in Munich to deal with the maintenance of relatives."

"You parade at least the semblance of force," I suggested.

"That is common sense. Nobody listens to the weak. You talk of democracy—I tell you the right and the purpose of democracy is to choose the best leader and follow him to the end."

Adolf Hitler was certain that he was the only possible leader.

We talked of frontiers. The politician took the place of the Idealist.

"We don't want to make war on anyone. We hope to come to an understanding with France by means of common sense. Some day we hope for a sensible readjustment of our other problems, but these are questions for the future."

"They are not imminent. Germany will be sufficiently occupied for a long time with the solution of her internal difficulties. The last thing we want is more territory."

"I appeal to all women to go back to their homes and to the ideals of the German housewife. I do not want women workers—I want German wives and mothers, fully occupied in bringing up large families."

"What am I going to do for German women? That is an easy question. I am going to provide them with better husbands."

I asked, "What are you going to do for all the enthusiastic young people who regard you as their last hope?"

"Germany's 'lost generation' is finding itself. The brown uniform is a symbol of service. I believe there is a great deal of talk in your country about the disillusioned post-war generation which is impatient with its elders because they are not content to grow old and stand aside.

"With you, age wants to remain young and to cling at the same time to its perquisites and privileges, so that youth sees itself growing old without ever having had a chance. That is not the case in Nazi Germany."

"Do you contemplate the restoration of the monarchy?" I asked.

"No," said Hitler. "At present the monarchy is like sour wine to the average German. It is a vintage which has gone bad in the cellar. It may be a question for the remote future. The German people have a right to select their own ruler, but it is unlikely they would choose as king any prince who has not worked for the new movement."

Before I took leave of the man who had then the chance of creating a new era of history, I asked him three personal questions for my own satisfaction.

"What quality do you most admire in men?"

"Courage and constancy."

"And in women?"

The Chancellor laughed. "That is more difficult. Understanding, I think, and a homely kindness."

"What has most moved or hurt you during your struggle? What single episode has most affected your life?"

Hitler looked at me and looked at the carpet. His hands twisted as if he were a boy wondering if he could bear to tell the truth. Then, with the utmost simplicity, he said, "*The death of a woman.*"

He meant his mother. She was a quiet, understanding person who influenced her son towards the Catholic Church.

Standing beside her grave, penniless except for a small sum which he hoped would take him to Vienna, Hitler shed the first tears he remembers and vowed to be a painter.

He shed no more until, in 1918, as a corporal, gassed and almost sightless, he heard of Germany's defeat and—so he told me—of the proclamation of the Republic.

It was then that he made another vow, to be first and foremost a politician.

I had other conversations with Hitler, and to this day I do not know how far he was sincere. For he had already written *Mein Kampf*, with its plans for the destruction of Europe and for a new world order. It may be that, with the first fruits of success in his hands, he was—temporarily—on good terms with life and so more malleable

than in later years. Personally, I believe he had two phobias, so violent that they affected him beyond sense or reason. Doctors may explain them as a disease or a form of mental derangement. I can only record that his loathing of Jews and of Communism were not sane. He was incapable of recognizing good either in Russia or in Jewry. On other subjects he could talk calmly, but when he remembered the young brown-shirts killed in skirmishes with political opponents, his misery and fury knew no reasonable bounds.

Yet, in 1933, he appeared to be sensible enough in his plans to counteract what he believed to be the destructive influence of Communism. I remember he once said, "Give a man even an acre of land and he will cease to be a Communist. Every worker should possess some concrete scrap of Germany. Develop his sense of possession, let him realize that he must *protect what is his own*, and he will no longer gamble with Bolshevism." From the beginning Hitler saw only one way of 'protecting' his own, and that was by force. He could also stretch his sense of Germanic possession to include lands and peoples totally alien. But I imagine his purpose grew with success so prodigious that it would have turned a stronger head than his. It is interesting to compare the different editions of *Mein Kampf*. The purport of this Nazi bible altered with its author's vaulting ambitions. The most interesting thing to my mind is whether the chance of peace was lost when Hitler became Chancellor. I discussed this for an hour with Sir Horace Rumbold after my first meeting with the Führer. We were alone in the British Ambassador's study, before a lunch-party at which various diplomatists expressed diverse and startling opinions. Sir Horace, I think, was a shrewd man, and he had considerable experience, but like all ambassadors, his range was limited by official restrictions. He could only meet those people whose acquaintance he could suitably acknowledge. I remember he said something like, "I'm not at all sure we could not use the new Chancellor, but we should have to be exceptionally unconventional in our methods, and it would mean a break with France."

Younger members of the Embassy staff, who could go about more freely and contact extremes of German public opinion, thought it might be possible to deal with Hitler, but only if we were willing to stomach his unrelenting opposition to the Jews and to Communism. Allen Graves said, "This is our last chance. The fellow isn't firm enough in his seat yet to do without support. If we provide it, we may be able to save the situation, but we must be quick. In a year, in a few months perhaps, it will be too late."

I am doubtful whether he was right. For Hitler had come into power on the popular feeling, "We are not going to get anything by negotiation. We have tried for fifteen years. We have achieved nothing. Life is not worth living. We have neither work nor hope. So let us tear up the Treaty of Versailles and see what force will do." It would

have been difficult for Adolf Hitler, a little man largely uneducated who knew no countries but his own and Austria, to turn completely round and ally himself with a Power whom he regarded as in leading strings to France. Yet, up till 1934 I believe he hankered for a British alliance. I think he was dissuaded by the hotheads among his advisers, who made the worst mistake in history by believing that England was of no account compared to *la grande nation* of Napoleon. They were obsessed by "luminous Paris" and the "finest army in Europe". That mistake cost Adolf Hitler his dream of world dominion. For when, in 1940, he had conquered France, his generals told him the war was finished. His subsequent visit to the tomb of Napoleon was homage to the 'design for living', which he most admired and whose lesson he wholly disregarded. For England was still undefeated. While she lived, she would fight. Oddly enough, Hitler knew it. Long ago, he had said to me, "You British fight better and better the longer the war lasts. If you are at it long enough, war becomes a habit with you. Then you are undefeatable."

Rumour has it that Hitler wanted to invade England with our fugitives from Dunkirk, but was opposed by his generals, who dislike acting without long and thorough preparation. If this is true, the strange, unimpressive, neurotic little carpenter-painter's flair was justified. Real victory might have been his, that June in 1940.

It is on Hitler's flair that the greater part of thinking Germany has counted. For a time it certainly had value. At what period it was lost or misused, only history can say.

Every human being who has met Hitler must speculate as to the character and original intentions of this man. It is too easy—and too false—to say with glib assurance that from the beginning his creed was devilry. For it re-created his own country on a socialist pattern. At one time it did for Germany all that Bolshevism did for Russia. It gave employment. It broke up or limited the big estates, and so shared among the people the products of the land. It set every human being to work. It looked after the health of the nation and restored its self-respect. As in Russia, there was far too much regimentation. There was appalling persecution of anyone who did not fit into the system. Where, in the first—and long ago—excesses of the Russian revolution, the nobles, the tradesmen, the farmers, the religious orders and the intellectuals were 'eliminated', in the Nazi revolution, Jews, Communists and Catholics suffered. Only unbiassed history can judge in which country the worst persecution occurred. But to my mind the fundamental difference is this—the accent in Russia was always on *work*, in Germany it was on *war*. It is no use pretending a great difference between the methods by which the two systems were inaugurated. Both relied first on force, and then on the secret police, the Gestapo in Germany, the OGPU in Russia. But I saw no racial persecution of any kind in Russia. In Germany it grew worse every year.

As the Soviet system became established, there was, I think, less and less cruelty. The exact reverse applies to Germany. As the Nazis became all-powerful, their original aims were lost. Hitler, I believe, changed with the thing he created. It did, in fact, become a monster, and with the appalling distortion or development of his always violent creed, he himself became more and more unbalanced. I kept notes of the conversations I had with the Führer, and I find them interesting to-day because they show the facility with which Hitler deceived himself. Thus it must have been easy for him to deceive the rest of the world. I never heard him pretend to truth—only to expediency. I never thought he was a great man. I do not even think he is great enough to be a devil. He is—to me—a little man with a big vision in which he believed, but which he could not resist distorting according to the politics of the moment. Influenced by the Prussian—and also the Saxon—faith in force which is deep-rooted in the present Germany, he went naturally from violence to violence. He was always the worst possible judge of men. I cannot remember ever having seen or heard of a worthwhile individual among his intimates. Those I met were for the most part despicable, brilliantly clever and definitely evil like Dr. Goebbels, or jugglers with impractical ideas, or unintelligent, lusty young men—all brawn and courage with no original thoughts—like the rank and file of the young Nazis. These were stalwart, healthy, arrogant, limited and intolerant in their outlook, and content to let the Führer think for them. With him, they had found the purpose they needed. Under him, they believed the future assured. They *did NOT WANT to think*.

At first, I believe they were cruel, with the gross stupidity of children torturing animals. In Patagonia I have seen the same inhumanity among unthinking peasants who, turned into policemen, stuck lighted matches into the nostrils of their victims to extract confessions. In Nazi Germany, as I saw it, cruelty grew into a studied vice, but not, of course, among all the young brown-shirts or black-shirts. Many I knew tried to shut their eyes to the growing evils of their creed and to see only—between blinkers—the material prosperity it had given to the Reich.

In August, 1933, I returned to Germany, and among many other places went to Berchtesgaden. In a copy-book I wrote, "Hitler in the Bavarian Tyrol, where he has a small farm-house near the Austrian frontier, does not differ greatly from the Chancellor in his Berlin office. His fanaticism goes well with the mountains and the picturesque villages. He is a Puritan surrounded by a curious mixture of intelligent decadents, of inquisitors, idealists who are capable of murder, and crusaders with the methods of gangsters, by artists striving to be practical and financiers juggling with precedent in order to be on both the safe and the winning side, but beyond these by the stalwart, enthusiastic youth of Germany. He has united the peasant and the

labourer with the student, the tradesman with the artisan, but he has not reached the feudal classes. With few exceptions, these have shut themselves up within their own walls, offering a passive resistance to the Chancellor's schemes for settling unemployed upon estates which although greatly reduced are still measured in miles."

It was after a frugal meal in his wooden chalet that Hitler repeated, "Wealth is the servant of the country, but not of one particular class. We have saved Germany from Bolshevism and from foreign control in order to teach Germans their responsibility towards each other. We must live simply in order that there may be enough for everyone. That is what I want for German-speaking peoples—that everybody should have *something*."

It seemed to me then that the Chancellor would not shrink from lowering the standard of living, so long as he could stretch it to include the last and least member of a Germanic union, which should include starving Austrians as well as unemployed Germans.

But in the Tiergarten of Berlin I came upon him by accident one night, walking alone in front of the great houses, with his head tilted back so that he could look up at the magnificent façades.

Perhaps he was criticizing the opulence of other generations. But it seemed to me that, as an architect, Hitler was admiring once again the splendour which, as a politician, he was forced to destroy. It was always, I thought then, the politician who would conquer. The vision which it is possible—although not certain—that the mystic once possessed would be outrageously twisted and crippled. It would be forced to meet the needs of personal and national ambition. Danger signals were already blazing red.

Soon after I returned to England I went to Liverpool, to speak for some civic concern. The Mayor and City Councillors were present. The ceremony was followed by an official reception. At it, I found myself discussing the difference between Germany, Russia and England with some school-teachers. I was still deeply impressed by the sacrifices young Communists or young Nazis were willing to make for their beliefs. I said something like this, "I don't see how England is going to keep up with other countries if she remains so set on amusement and leisure. In Moscow or Berlin, every vital young creature thinks in terms of 'what more can I do for my country?' whereas over here it seems to me the general idea is 'what more can my country do for me?'" I expected an outcry among the Council teachers. There was none. To this day I remember one of them, intelligent and worn, on the borders of middle age, replying, after due consideration, "Well, I think we are more reasonable. I do feel that I've worked fairly hard for a long time and my country does owe me something. It can't be all on one side." She was right, in theory. But I was frightened. In a third-class sleeper, returning to London, I discussed the matter with a younger woman. She worked in an advertising firm. She had a blind

faith in England's superiority. Whatever we did was right. "Why?" I asked desperately, remembering the prodigious efforts and the gallant achievements of Russia, where an agricultural nation was bent on industrial production vast as the milky way—which I could see outside the window. My companion was undisturbed. "We may be selfish," she said. "I don't say we're not. What I say is we've the right to be." Again I asked why? The girl replied, "Well, look what we do whenever it comes to a war? What would happen to the rest of the world without us?" At the time I found this speech exasperating. But it was also prophetic.

## CHAPTER XL

1933

### *Reminder of Kufra. New Deal in Washington*

IN THE EARLY AUTUMN OF 1933 I was reminded of my first serious journey—to Kufra twelve years ago. For there appeared suddenly upon my doorstep an attractive young French journalist called Marie Edith de Bonneuil. She had come from North Africa. While there she had flown to Kufra with some Italian airmen in a three-engined Caproni. The journey had taken eight hours instead of as many weeks—by camel. Italian occupation had changed the oasis. It was no longer the 'holy place', capital of a tariq stretching from the Nile to Mauretania. The mosque, with the tomb of the sainted Mahdi, had been closed for political reasons. There were barracks, club, school and hospital—all new.

Marie de Bonneuil wrote an interesting article in the *Sphere* in which she said Italy had changed Kufra "from a Senussi Vatican into a Libyan Gibraltar". "Outside the zawia," she recorded, "two of the 'ekhwan' who received Rosita Forbes were waiting. 'It was I who met the Sayeda Khadija,' said Mohamed el Bakri (cousin of the Senussi Emir). 'She stayed seven days with us. Look, behind those blue curtains she slept,' and he pointed to the house of Mohamed el Abed. 'She did eat and sit and dress like one of us. But we never saw her face for she was always veiled.'" Madame de Bonneuil delighted the pressmen who interviewed her by telling them that the room in which I had slept at Kufra had been turned into a 'Qubba', a holy place, and that the Senussi 'ekhwan' were waiting for the second coming of the mysterious 'Sayeda Khadija' to free them from the Italians. In her article she told how she arrived in Jaghabub, where Hassanein Bey and I had come out of the great desert after twelve days without water. "Here again I came in contact with those who had known Rosita" (as Khadija, daughter of Abdullah Fahmi). "I was shown the room

where she slept, which to every 'ekhwan' is sacred. No Italian officer has ever passed the door."

It amused me to think of myself as a legend in Libya. And I remembered the old Arab prophecy which I published in *The Times* when Italy seized Kufra. It ran, "If an infidel footstep presses the stones of this holy place, within ten years it will be obliterated by a marching host. But the foreign dominion will only endure for a decade. Then it will be swept away like salt on the desert surface." A Fascist army occupied Kufra in January, 1931, exactly ten years after my "infidel footstep" had "pressed the stones" of the Qubba sacred to the Senussi Saint. Madame de Bonneuil described the 'iron river' which the Italians built at a cost of twenty million liras to defend their new colony. Nearly fifty million metres of barbed wire were used on this astounding embankment with its forts, blockhouses and aerodromes. Yet it fell to British forces in 1941, ten years after the Italian occupation. So the prophecy was fulfilled, and Mussolini's infidel dominion swept away like salt blown from a desert marsh.

Immediately after Marie de Bonneuil's visit, in the autumn of 1933, I went to America for another lecture tour, this time under Colston Leigh. The slump was at its worst. The States were shaken, for they had believed in everything—at different times—except in being poor. But the States were also indomitable. Perhaps I saw them at their best that winter. There was a Latter Day atmosphere, with the bottom falling out of the market, banks closing like limpets and no grass to be seen in the public parks because of the unemployed who slept there. But America was fighting back—and fighting hard.

Roosevelt had come into power while his compatriots were waiting for the Day of Judgement, and business men with illusions frozen in Trust Companies were saying, "Maybe it's good for us. We were getting along too fast. We thought we could do anything."

Some papers described the burgeoning of the New Deal as a Sunday-school revolution complete with blue ribbon and woolly lamb. Certainly, the President's smile took the place of rifles and was much more effective. The New Deal's blue eagle flapped its wings where the red flag might have flown. 'Main Street' did not know quite where it was going, but it was thankful to be on the way. Only Wall Street spoke of N.R.A. as a joke, and "a bad one at that".

I went to Washington to stay with my brother Tony and Maude. They introduced me to an enormous lot of friends, mostly experimentalists in one way or another. They gave lovely parties for me and took me to other people's parties. At that time, Washington took its parties seriously. It went to them with a grim determination that never, never, under any circumstances, however bored, weary, cramped, suffocated, somnolent it might be, would it so far forget its manners as to go home and go to bed. Hence there were the most peculiar conversations every morning in Government offices, where one exhausted



assistant secretary would say to another, "What was your party like last night?"

"Pretty good."

"What did you do?"

"Oh, nothing much, but we didn't get home until four."

"As early as that? I'll say I went to a better show."

"What did you do?"

"Why, nothing, I guess, but nobody moved till six."

The criterion of Washington parties was not 'Who did you meet?' or—as in war London—'What did you eat?' but 'How long did you stay?'

Dinner was always gay. For an hour or two afterwards the guests, cosmopolitan and beautifully dressed in a manner indicating, as clearly as if it were expressed in words, that there were more important things afoot in the political and diplomatic capital than the last vagary of fashion, exchanged ideas. They talked about the Gold Standard. It was always the Gold Standard, but good form allowed the inclusion of such variations as inflation and devaluation. By midnight everything reasonable had been said.

After 2 a.m. nobody admitted or denied anything. Talking was reduced to a few spasmodic remarks. Everybody had a drink handy, but it was too much effort to reach it. Sunk in the most luxurious of armchairs, or upon sofas which were poems and prayers, the guests were fully occupied with, tensely concentrated on, the determination not to go home.

The most popular woman in Washington once told me she had achieved her desirability as a guest at all the best parties by learning how to sleep on her feet. "I can do it for two or three minutes at a time, and the instant I wake up I can carry on the conversation just where I dropped it." Undoubtedly it gave great cachet to a party if at 5 or 6 a.m., after ten hours of intermittent talk, even one woman was still in a vertical position.

I went to a Sunday supper at a famous house. It was given by one of the most celebrated hostesses in Washington, a Democrat who had entertained everyone interesting in the days of Wilson and had contrived to maintain the prestige of her salon during the 'long lean years in the wilderness of Republicanism'. Now she was in her element. A strong, vigorous personality, the sort of woman for whom trains wait and royalty advances beyond prescribed limits, she dominated thirty or forty guests eating unwisely but so well at half a dozen different tables. As soon as the last Ambassador, Secretary of State, Senator and Professor—translated from the obscurity of a university to the limelight of the White House—had swallowed the last mouthful of food, she rapped upon the table. "Now we will have a discussion and get to the bottom of things." America loves getting to the bottom of things, especially if it is a thoroughly rational and scientific bottom.

But there were simpler parties. America has a gift for parties. Perhaps because she enjoys them so much, she is bound to make a success of them.

I remember one particularly at which every conversation turned to the possibilities of cheap money—easy money—new paper money turned out as fast as mass production could sell goods to balance greenbacks.

An Assistant Secretary to the Treasury let his shell-fish soufflé grow cold while he explained how much he missed the godlike feeling he had acquired while fixing the current price of gold at precisely half-past ten each morning.

"It was better than any amount of tonic, although it did seem rather blasphemous——"

"Will my gold shares go up? I've forgotten what they are, but it's something 'deep'?" queried an irrepressible dowager.

"One thing I'd like to know," said a voice that could not be traced. "When will purchasing power catch up with the increased costs of production?"

"On May thirty-second," murmured an equally anonymous guest.

The Director of Propaganda for N.R.A. broke in with, "Come now, that's all nonsense. Purchasing power has been increasing every month. Maybe there's a slight slump at the moment because some stores have been boosting up prices unnecessarily. The profit hogs are one of the problems we're up against, but we'll deal with them all right."

An intelligent woman suggested that, for the housewife, rock-bottom had been reached a few months ago. The store cupboard was empty. Repairs and replacements were essential.

"I want to know about the Stock Exchange Bill," said a voice representing the whole American nation, for where an Englishman puts a shilling on a horse his Transatlantic cousin buys twenty cents' worth of stock.

The same voice continued, "How can I make any money if I've got to put up 40 per cent worth of cover before I can buy on margin?"

At that moment I remembered Henry Ford, in an office chair at Detroit, saying to me, "Business to the average American has ceased to mean buying and selling. It's just a gamble."

Consequently the new Bill, destined to limit the marginal operations of speculators who had ruined themselves once and were ready to do so again as soon as "things improved", was the most unpopular measure introduced under the New Deal.

That it would become law, one of the several million laws adorning the Statute Book, was the fear of every American heart. That it would become effective was a nightmare, impossible for anyone to face.

"You should worry!" murmured a Western Senator under cover of the talk which exploded at the very mention of a Bill threatening the liberty of the American millionaire, elevator boy, street-car con-

ductor, negro porter, real-estate broker, bonds salesman, grocer, butcher and ice-cream pedlar, to gamble with the price of a new yacht or to-morrow's breakfast.

"If the Bill passes, it's a cinch there'll be some way round it. Call it sugar for a pile of sharp lawyers and you've said a mouthful."

Conversation drifted from Wall Street to war debts. Washington was decidedly peace-minded, so the general attitude was that if Europe had enough money to increase her armaments in preparation for another war, she sure had enough to pay for the last one.

A small minority were in favour of what they vaguely referred to as "international co-operation", but at that moment America was naturally most interested in herself.

Washington was oppressed by her responsibility towards the drought-seared agricultural areas, whose farmers saw no reason why a far-away Europe should be released from debt while local mortgages were foreclosed.

I retired to a sofa with an earnest but charming woman, Frances Perkins, of the National Board of Labour. She told me that 90 per cent of the strikes with which her department had to deal were caused by the men's endeavours to form themselves into Unions and the employers' objection to collective bargaining.

"It's natural enough," she said. "In England, the Unions have grown slowly. Their authority has developed with experience. But ours have jumped to sudden power, and they don't know how to use it."

She added, "N.R.A. will get over that in time. The big thing we've done is to restore confidence. The American was beginning to lose all faith in himself or anything else. In good days he didn't bother about the Government, but now the ordinary man looks to Washington for a lead. Our activity in tackling all these problems is the key to which the whole nation will tune itself. It's sometimes better, you know, to do the wrong thing than nothing at all."

But Main Street was sure it was not the wrong thing. All it wanted was more money to take advantage of recovery, to meet it half-way, to get ahead of it, maybe.

"Easy money." "Lots of money." "Print more money." "What's the harm of printing a greenback and giving it to an unemployed so's he can go buy something with it?" was the general feeling of the American public.

Washington, of course, was divided. On one side were the sound financiers who craved for a properly balanced Budget and a speedy return to the gold standard.

Prominent among them was the brilliant Director of the Budget, Lew Douglas, a loyal supporter of the President but a sincere Liberal, too far-seeing to be blind to the pitfalls of inflation.

With them were certain leaders of Big Business, who saw their

profits dwindling with the dollar and who made emotional speeches about robbing the poor of their savings.

On the other side were the experimental economists, who saw no reason why commodities should not fix the price of the dollar. Some of them would have liked to get away from gold altogether.

They said, "The United States can spend within its own boundaries all the greenbacks the Treasury can print. It is only when a country can buy nothing with her depreciated currency that inflation becomes dangerous.

"So long as our mass production keeps pace with our Treasury Printing Press, so that purchasing power and therefore demand and supply, increases with the amount of paper money, inflation can only be beneficial."

Late one night, after a particularly good party, Mr. Harrison, the Director of the Federal Reserve Bank, acknowledged that there "might be something in the theory".

Midway between the two schools of thought were those who frankly said, "I don't know. Something's got to be done certainly. Here we still have hundreds of thousands on the borders of starvation in the richest country in the world, a country so preposterously rich that it can not only supply its own needs many times over, but pour out money to finance South America or Central Europe. There must be some solution. What is it?"

To this hard-headed Senator Borah retorted, "America never was so darned rich except on paper. Some man may have had three hundred million dollars in half a dozen accounts, and that's too much for one man anyway. But listen to this, at the very height of our boom years three-fifths of America's total population were living on less than sixteen dollars a week."

So it went on.

Roughly, America was divided into three groups, capital, industrial labour and agriculture. All of them were represented at Washington.

Consequently, there was no end to argument. At three in the morning the relics of exhausted dinner-parties, who two years ago would have been silent and supine, determined only not to go home lest anyone should suspect they had not had a good time, were still fiercely argumentative.

"Purchasing power is far more important than production," came from a Secretary of State supporting a heap of cushions.

"D'you realize that it would take an annual expenditure of forty billion dollars to restore American prosperity, and here we are patting ourselves on the back because the Government is spending three billions this year on public works?" boomed a senatorial voice from the depths of a Colonial armchair.

But it nearly always ended with a chorus, "Put a greater volume of money into circulation," which meant, of course, inflation.

Then, while the last of the 'Sound Financiers' were protesting, Washington, feeling that it had been extremely modern in reducing economics from an exact science to an experiment, went home, yawning, to bed.

I found such discussions entertaining. Talking always of money—as if it were primeval matter out of which a world could be shaped—I felt Olympian. I only wished I could use glove-stretchers on my brain as well as my eyes. For it must be confessed I do not understand international finance.

Lady Lindsey, the British Ambassadors, took me to the White House to be presented to Mrs. Roosevelt. Later the President's wife asked me to tea. I had heard the saying, "There are no closed doors at the White House," and I remembered it in the First Lady's pleasant sitting-room, very simply furnished, with gay chintzes and a great many books. There was a view of wide corridor beyond the open doors, and suddenly—at express speed it seemed to me—along it came the President's wheeled chair propelled by the President's own muscular arms, while his large, cheerful voice came ahead of him, "Hullo! Who have you got there?"

A breathless moment and I was shaking hands with the man whom America then regarded as the last and most insoluble of miracles.

"Tell me about camels. You have a way with them, I hear," he suggested in a breezy way.

"Have you arranged a code for them?" I asked, remembering N.R.A.

"Oh, yes—we're dealing with these all right," and he fished a packet of Camel cigarettes out of his pocket and offered me one. In such irresponsible fashion began my acquaintanceship with Franklin Roosevelt.

In Washington at the time there were those who described him as "a Tory anarchist", "a red-hot Socialist", "a country gentleman with all the prejudices of his class", "the most astute politician who ever reigned at the White House", "a Gladstonian idealist", and "either the best or the last President America will ever have".

A business man without illusions told me he had spent one of the most interesting hours of his life watching "Franklin" handle a hostile deputation. "The men represented a trust which had been pretty well shorn. They were as tough as they are made and they went to the White House determined not to yield a cent. By the time they had been there half an hour the President had got 'em."

With a grim smile the business man added, "No bird would be safe on its bough with that man about!"

My first impression of President Roosevelt was of a human dynamo generating energy all over the place. As soon as he entered his wife's sitting-room the atmosphere quickened. When he left—to meet Mr. Litvinoff, newly arrived from Moscow—the whole place was empty.

Double the vigour of an ordinary man's body has gone into that tremendous torso, hard-trained as an athlete's, so that the crippled legs are no more than the sign of a superhuman gallantry. And the mind which dictates to an appreciative, doubtful, or resentful but always surprised America is equally vital.

Seated at his desk in the octagonal room at the White House, the President seems to tower over the standing figures around him. I went to one of his informal Press conferences and from a sofa watched the crowd of journalists very much on their feet, baiting him with hard questions.

Victory, however, remained with the seated figure. The throng of young men seemed to shrink in stature.

"How do you do it?" I asked when the room emptied.

"Words are a good enough barrage if you know how to use them," returned the President, and it occurred to me that he had certainly mastered the art of verbal camouflage. I think it was then that I asked him if he was out for "painless Socialism", and he retorted, "Not Socialism but social justice. It is pretty obvious by now that some people could do with a little less and many with a good deal more. The whole trend of the world," he added, "is towards equalizing conditions. It is doubtful if the individual to-day can amass a vast fortune by means of some spectacular business monopoly except at the expense of his fellows. It is probable that further progress can only be achieved by men working together for their mutual benefit.

"We are trying things out, and if one theory doesn't succeed we scrap it and try another. You must remember we are a continent, not a nation. We have forty-eight different States, so that we can try experimental legislation in two or three without fixing a burden on the whole country in the shape of a Federal law. That's where we're better off than you in England."

One phrase of Roosevelt's impressed me very much. We were talking about the inelasticity of constitutional systems. "The principal object of every Government all over the world," he said, "seems to have been to impose the ideas of the last generation upon the present one. That's all wrong." Quick, candid, courageous, Roosevelt is not only in touch with modern thought but ahead of it.

He seemed to me to have a deep and genuine sympathy with working men and women, but I never thought of him as an idealist. There is not a grain of sentiment in his make-up.

It is thus that he differs from most of his compatriots whose sugar-sweet theories are always at war with the ruthlessness finding expression in Wall Street, in gangsters and G-men and racketeers, in the hiring of thugs armed with machine-guns to break strikes legalized by the unions.

Roosevelt is essentially a politician. He is, therefore, supremely

adaptable. "Which do you believe in most, Roosevelt or America?" I asked him.

"Both," he said, and laughed.

It was comparatively early in the morning, but he had already dealt with business deputations, a conference, and the 'boys' of the Press with whom he was on the most familiar terms. He had also had a dip in the swimming-pool, round which he propels himself rapidly and forcibly with bludgeon strokes of his exceptionally powerful arms. But he was not at all tired. He did not even give the impression of being hurried. He encouraged me to tell tales of politicians and diplomats out of school. He was interested in the "back doors" as he called them, of all the countries I had visited.

"When I came into office," President Roosevelt said to me, "the machine was stalled. If one expedient wouldn't make it go, we had to try another."

I was enthralled by the man's assurance, which is at once his armour and his battle-flag. His amazing smile, composite of vigour and courage and the joy of a fight—any fight—is more effective than other men's words. All his gestures are on a large scale. He seems to be always on the brink of action. He gives the impression of pausing—not resting—before some prodigious creation.

For Roosevelt can never rest. He can never relax. Not for one single moment can he let up on himself. He must never show depression, doubt, or exhaustion, for he is the force which keeps the machine working.

Marie of Roumania once said to me, "It is such fun being a Queen."

I think Roosevelt gets the same enjoyment out of being President. I saw him once pick up the telephone to answer a long-distance call. I do not know what New York or San Francisco was saying at the other end, but it goaded my host into a display of lightning force. "Go to it!" he shouted into the instrument. "Beat them to it! I'll say you can do it."

I found the President particularly interesting on the subject of Russia. He said, "Fundamentally our two peoples have something in common. It would be ridiculous to ignore the existence of 180,000,000 people with a stable Government just because, a generation ago, a wholly different Government—one might almost say a wholly different country—acted against our interests. The period of revolution in Russia is over. The period of reconstruction has begun and every country must of necessity be interested in the final form that reconstruction is going to take."

Roosevelt expressed the feelings of average America when he said, "The tendency of the world is to become regional, and the continent of the U.S.A. is very nearly self-sufficient. I'm inclined to think world trade is becoming less and less feasible. India is making her own cotton goods. Brazil is building her own factories. Germany is determined to grow her own food instead of importing it.

"If you study the question you'll find that trade problems, without being necessarily insular or national, are definitely regional. Your Empire policy is an illustration of this. So is my belief in free trade"—pause and a smile—"between the forty-eight countries of the U.S.A. continent. You see, every land has got to find the nearest and the most reciprocative markets."

Much of what the President said has proved to be correct. Like America itself, he has always been concerned with the day after tomorrow or the year after next. Like the skyline of New York—frontier to us of an allied continent—his is the stimulus of a new civilization where individuals are in the crucible, with race speech, and religion.

## CHAPTER XLI

1933

### *Night of Repeal. Chicago*

THAT YEAR IN AMERICA, while I spoke of the "making of to-day" in Europe and the Middle East and of the leaders responsible for what Dorothy Thompson called "this generation's appointment with destiny", I met many interesting people. Colonel Lindbergh was still a hero. From 'flying fool' crossing the Atlantic with a packet of wheaten sandwiches and a bundle of letters of introduction to explain who he was, he had turned into the 'flying sphinx'. Few knew what he thought. Nobody heard him say the whole of it.

Amelia Earhart was equally reticent. She went about bareheaded and unpainted. I admired her enormously, chiefly because when reporters asked her why she had crossed the Atlantic, she replied, "Because I wanted to." It seemed to me an excellent reason. She drove me across Illinois, and in Rockford appealed to a policeman, "Can you tell me the way? I am lost." The patrolman stared at her as if she had dropped from heaven. "You can't be," he assured her earnestly. "Not after the Atlantic. It ain't possible."

At that time Baruch, the eagle of Wall Street, 'Barney' to most people, was one of America's pet mysteries. I thought he had some of Churchill's qualities, for he was a mixture of impetuosity, ideas, all of them daring, and action. Mr. Baruch's immense height, his slow, appealing smile, his finely-cut features under snow-white hair, his tremendous belief in himself and the things for which he stood, his capacity for friendship and his infallible memory, made him remarkable. I liked him—and his beautiful house on Fifth Avenue where I dined *en famille*. And I was amused by the way he had become one of the few things in which all good Americans believe. These, of course, may change with the years, but in the winter of 1933-34, they included



the theories that mothers are beyond criticism, dagoes are untrustworthy, the new generation is 'plumb wild', and Barney Baruch behind everything startling on Wall Street.

Henry Ford was another agreeable mystery. When I reached Detroit, an enormous car met me at the station. A neat and discreet young man informed me that Mr. Ford was glad to have me visit the town and that he would be equally glad for me to see anything I wanted—except himself. The conversation proceeded something like this:

"Is Mr. Ford in Detroit?"

"I guess he may have gone away."

"Where to?"

"Maybe he'll have gone to Washington."

"When did he go?"

"Waal, I haven't heard of him since this morning."

"Can't we find out at his house?"

"I guess they won't know any more. Mr. Ford gets about a lot."

"But somebody must know where he is."

"Mr. Bennett might know——"

"We'll get hold of him then."

"I guess he's gone places. His secretary can't exactly say where."

So it went on. Obviously it was much easier to talk familiarly with any European monarch than to have a glimpse of Henry Ford. Never have I known a better organized smoke-service. Mr. Ford always knew exactly where his car had taken me, what I had asked about wages or the rolling-belt system, and to which of the foremen I had talked, but nobody ever knew the whereabouts of Mr. Ford. There had been threats to kidnap his son. There had been rumours that the motor magnate would stand as a Republican at the next presidential election. There were engaging stories of Mr. Ford too busy to have breakfast, retreating into the garden to eat an apple and then disappearing.

Superlatively trained secretaries had not the least idea where he could be found. No, he was not at his home. No, they did not think he was in town. Mr. Bennett would certainly ask Mrs. Ford, but before the Joan of Henry's Darby would say anything definite, Mr. Bennett himself had faded out of reach. At last, after I had inspected everything from Boy Scouts to car-spraying apparatus, Mr. Ford decided he would like to see me. Suddenly everybody knew just what he was doing, and it would apparently be convenient for me to visit him at any time. The car swept me out beyond the city confines to the town of its own where the arbiter of the motor industry, and the high priest of mass production, has his offices. They consist largely of windows, and they produce the effect of a laboratory or surgery combined with an artistically arranged museum. Henry Ford, richest of America's multi-millionaires, behind a moderate desk, was on the defensive. No two persons' impressions of anybody are the same. Probably mine were superficial,

but the first thing I noticed was the disarming clarity of very blue eyes. Mr. Ford moved very little. He seemed to me slight, spare, a mixture of pale colours with his greying hair and 'indoor' skin. The whole effect was rather sparse. He had a pleasant, monotonous voice without modulations. He was careful of what he said, although it was only a casual meeting. But times were serious. Big business was fighting tooth and nail against what it called "a sentimental policy, disastrous rather than democratic". No doubt its captains had suffered at the hands of their critics.

I had come from Washington. The papers had reported my meetings with the President.

"There's nothing wrong with America," said Henry Ford. "The country's so strong nothing will stop its eventual recovery. The fellows at Washington know that. Whatever they pull out of the political hat, improvement will go on just the same."

Other kinds of people I met in the States—John Raymond McCarl, Controller-General in Washington, nicknamed "the meanest man in the world" because for thirteen years he had been trying to put a brake on official expenditure, and Donald Richberg, crusading lawyer of N.R.A. He had begun life as "the State's farewell gift to the doomed". For, as a young attorney, he defended men with and without felonious intent. When I met him, he was a mixture of poet and lawyer—happiest with a violin against his shoulder, undefeated in his spectacular battles for organized labour. When he smashed a Federal injunction he said he was avenging a client who had cashed somebody else's five-dollar order by mistake. That case he had lost twenty years ago and never forgotten. Then there was William Bullett, a friend of my brother's—soon afterwards American Ambassador in Moscow. He was always full of energy and ideas.

In Chicago, I saw a good deal of the Henry Fields. He was head of the great museum, young, interesting, vital and prodigiously informed. She was lovely—red-headed, slender as an arrow, with a quick grace of movement suggesting wind in reeds. She was a brilliant and original hostess. I was with the Fields on the surprising night when America went wet. We made a tour of the town. Unexpected things were happening. An exquisite young waiter, fine flower of prohibition, was seen serving champagne in cocktail glasses. Worse still, a 'gentleman'—it only shows how widely and how unwisely the word has been stretched—a 'gentleman' of distinguished appearance was heard offering a lady, a Real Lady with only one row of pearls, a glass of port with her soup.

Head-waiters, who had fought in front-line trenches and returned unblemished, had nervous breakdowns after that Night when America went wet! They could not be everywhere at once. No sooner had one of them prevented a neophyte from icing the claret in the same pail as the champagne, than, with sweat breaking from his forehead,

he had to race across the room to prevent a visiting Frenchman from receiving in a tumbler the precious Château-Yquem, which, with tears and prayers, had been preserved since 1921.

The speak-easies, whitewashed inside and out, were proudly selling legitimate liquor for approximately three times the price they had charged for bootleg drink, but the barmen were not yet proficient in the new language. They had not exactly gone on strike. They just stood about gaping, while gay holiday-makers, wanting something different, something amusing and a trifle absurd, surged up to the reinforced counters and begged for "Fourth Regiments", "Between the Sheets", for "Angels' Kisses", "Merry Widows", "Lone Trees", or "White Ladies".

They might just as well have demanded South Sea Island Kava spat into coco-nut shells. "Can't you talk English?" protested one exasperated youth. "I'm not a dictionary, and this ain't a perfumery counter, nor yet a highfalutin sex-stuff book-store."

The manager of the noblest caravanserai in Chicago had had a brain-wave. From sad, but honoured, retirement, he had dragged—by what tactics is not known, for the person in question was reading the 1,300th page of *Anthony Adverse* in the original, a bartender of the old days when men were men and women could do what they liked with them. "You must teach the boys to make 'Clover Leaves', and 'Orange Blossoms', and 'Blue Staggers', not to speak of 'Mint-juleps' and 'Old-fashioneds'," he said. "And give them a hint of style in doing it. Most of them look at a jigger as if it were a sewing-machine. Teach them to play on it like a fiddle—you know the game—style, that's what we want."

The ancient bartender found a dozen young men, eager and immaculately white, with collars unblemished and cuffs like the Great Wall of China, and a great many bottles—a very great many bottles.

He began, "Now first you take a jigger of brandy," and he looked round for a jigger, but there was not any. Neither was there a gill, nor an ice-pick, nor even a muddler. "How d'you expect me to learn you to mix decent, respectable cocktails if you haven't got a single solitary thing to do it with?" thundered the man whose name had once ranked in the bars with those of Channel swimmers and Atlantic flyers.

The immaculate, white-coated young men rushed in all directions, returning, one by one, with shakers and strainers and muddlers, gills and spoons and ponics. With reverence, they watched the Grand Old Man produce a genuine Clover Club. It was an awe-inspiring moment. "Perfect!" said the manager with watering eyes. "Now you, boy"—indicating the most starched and ironed and shaved and brushed of all young men who were going to make a new kind of living showing the great American public what it should drink. "I don't sup-

pose you've swallowed a drop of decent liquor in your life. TASTE THIS." The last two words were obviously in capitals.

There was silence while the neophyte drank. A puzzled expression appeared on his face, and was reflected on eleven others of approximately the same age. Was it possible that the miracle was not so miraculous after all?

"Well, well, what d'you think of it?" asked the manager.

The neophyte was dumb. His employer patted him sympathetically on the back, and said with feeling, "I guess it's the greatest moment you've known——" But—alas—it was not the greatest drink!

American palates had been spoiled by the years during which they poured liquid fire down their throats and spluttered wry-faced before the ensuing kick lifted them rocketwise into a state of elation independent of Wall Street.

"I'll say this isn't even a throat tickler," said a young lawyer at the party with which we finished the evening of repeal. Somebody came to the rescue with a hip flask.

## CHAPTER XLII

1933

### *Adventure with the Police. Chicago*

THAT WINTER OF 1933-34 America was launching a spectacular drive against crime in its organized forms. For years the leading gangsters had been front-page news. Their attorneys acted as publicity agents. Al Capone, Spike O'Donnell and Bugs Moran were asked for as many autographs as Charlie Chaplin. Few schoolboys could tell you the names of American Secretaries of State, but all were familiar with gangster history.

The Henry Fields knew all about Chicago. When I remarked that I would like to see the police at work, they sent me to see the Commissioner—in the company of an illustrious citizen. To him I said I wanted to go out one night with the Flying Squad. "Impossible," was the answer. But I had already seen the gangster idea of night-life—in company with Spike O'Donnell, then Public Enemy No. 2. To this strange man I had brought an introduction from a *Daily Express* reporter. With him and his attorney and a member of his bodyguard fully armed, I had spent a night out among the 'hot spots'.

At exactly the right moment, the illustrious citizen said, "She ought to hear the case for the police." "Even if it is the last thing she does hear," retorted the Commissioner. He looked at the front sheet of a newspaper on his desk. It was devoted to a highly coloured account, complete with photographs, of my forty-eight hours acquaintanceship

with the Irish Spike O'Donnell. "Seems you've already been getting about quite a lot," continued the Commissioner. He pointed to a wall lined with police badges. "Those are the stars of men in this division killed on duty." I thought of a cemetery in Flanders.

"You really want to go," reflected the Commissioner of Police, his eyes on the proud testimony of the wall. "Yes, of course." So a few nights later I was put in charge of Lieutenant Charles Welling, of the Patrol Department. He told me to keep my eyes open and wits skinned. "They go like bats out of hell," he added, as I was packed into car 41 of the Hoodlum Squad. There was a radio under the dashboard and a list of fifty stolen vehicles—that day's harvest—hung on the wind-screen. Each detective carried a revolver. Under the back seat were tear-gas bombs. These are used against armed criminals who have barricaded themselves into some space which the police cannot rush without unnecessary loss of life. Bags of cartridges loaded with buck-shot hung behind the back seats, and my feet were entangled in a couple of sawed-off guns, with repeating magazines.

Some of the cars carry Maxims and when the police have to storm a staircase or other position where the criminal is entrenched in command of the situation, they use a six-foot metal shield. "But it spoils your aim," said the Lieutenant. "You can't see to shoot from behind it."

"I suppose you're pretty used to shooting," said I, amazed at the courage with which these plain-clothes detectives go into action. Nothing stops them. They will drive ninety miles an hour over greasy or frozen streets, straight across red lights, right-angle corners taken with a screech of tyres but no braking. It is a point of honour not to use the siren for fear of warning criminal or suspect.

They go into a hold-up—three or four against a gang—with the driver left at the wheel, his revolver their only cover. And they pay for their gallantry. Fourteen policemen had lost their lives on duty that year, and all that marked their heroism was a row of numbered stars hung on the wall of the Commissioner's office.

"Well, I'd say we've all of us been in plenty of shooting matches. It's our job," said the Lieutenant modestly, and then we were off with the radio intoning: "Car 15; Call your station." Our first stop was the depot of the 5th District at Wabash and 48th Street. It is the world's busiest police station, with an average of three hundred and sixty-five murders a year.

In the centre of the black district—where the niggers arm themselves with long, single-bladed razors so that reports describe a 'cutting' instead of a 'killing'—it deals with some thirty-two thousand prisoners a year, approximately one-third of whom are women.

"We've had as many as twelve men in on murder charges in one night," said the Sergeant-in-Charge, and one of the detectives countered with, "In the Italian quarter, when two gangs were playing up, there were nine killings in one week—all on the same corner."

We looked at the cells, which resembled square, heavily-barred cages. The largest seemed to be crowded with cheerful dark figures who gave an excellent imitation of apes. One boy, cheered by chocolate-coloured friends, hung head downwards from the top bars. Another swung himself from hand to hand across the cell making suitable noises.

"The average mentality of the habitual tough is about six or seven years old," said a plain-clothes man, watching antics which would have done credit to the jungle. "These are all habituals. They're in and out most of the time. We have to charge them with something specific, or let them go within forty-eight hours. They get three meals a day while they're in—bread, sausage, and black coffee without any sugar."

A matron in pleasant sports clothes took me round the women's cells. There were only two occupants behind the bars which cut off half the room from floor to ceiling. One was a Pole who had just tried to strangle herself with a piece of ribbon. On the next bed sat a fashionable young person in black taffeta with transparent flaring sleeves. In another cell a Romany face looked out at us, proud and imperious under a scarlet handkerchief. I had rarely seen such beauty of bone and line, and it was enhanced by the bright-coloured gypsy dress. "They tell your fortune and steal your purse at the same time," said the matron—but what a far cry from Egypt to a Chicago cell!

After leaving the police station, we visited cellars where men drank dangerous stuff under the guise of beer. We glanced into the Big House, night-club, not prison, where coloured and half-coloured yellow, white, brown, and black danced to a thunderstorm of brass.

We answered—at a speed which left me considerably shaken—two fake calls. We heard "armed men creating disturbance at ——" and silently fled there, to meet another squad car on the threshold and nobody in sight. We picked up an emergency order for three cars. "Man shot at ——" and found the victim was already very dead and his assailants departed.

Then, while we were progressing gently at some fifteen miles an hour through a desolate quarter, empty of traffic, where the house-fronts peeled and the shutters hung awry over broken windows, a car shot suddenly out of an alley. It was a hundred yards in front of us and it was going full speed.

"That's a wrong one!" exclaimed the Lieutenant. "Go after it, boy!" We went. In a moment the speedometer registered seventy-five. At this pace we swung into a main road, where tramlines were ribbons of ice amid the half-melted snow and grease. The suspect car must have seen us, for in spite of our efforts it drew away.

"They've a nose on them all right, and they can see out of the backs of their heads. Look—they've crossed the red lights. Keep going, boy!" ordered the Lieutenant.

We did so. The car in front took a corner on three wheels. We followed with a screech which seemed to combine the protest of metal, rubber, and glass.

"Gained a bit that time," remarked the Lieutenant, his hand in his pocket. Three more right-angle corners, and then—with our quarry only fifty yards away—we plunged into a tangle of alleys. Down the narrowest we shot.

It was like going into a burrow. Out again into a wider street. The needle of the speedometer quivered at the top of its range. At a corner, netted in tramlines, a street car was crossing. Disaster seemed inevitable. There was no room to pass between a telegraph pole on the pavement and the approaching tram.

The lights were against us. Six yards from what seemed the end of everything the driver went into second without slackening speed—it was a synchro-mesh gear.

He flung the wheel over. In a series of incredible skids we swept—right—behind the tram—left—alongside it, evaded by a hair's breadth a two-ton truck coming in the opposite direction, swung left again in front of the still-moving tram, and at right-angles round the corner it three-parts blocked, all in the same second.

Never in any motor race have I seen such a miracle of driving.

By this time, cartridges, guns, and the occupants of the back seat were considerably mixed, but the Lieutenant contrived to keep me from doing much damage either to myself or to the splinter-proof windows. The suspect car, hard pressed, spun round another corner, just as the detective on the front seat fired point-blank at it.

"Sure, we're gaining——" said our driver. Everything from tyres to roof emitted a scream of strain. The occupants of both cars were now shooting.

We can't do it, I thought, watching the narrowest of all corners rush at us.

The next instant we were in an alley with no sign of our quarry. Dark passages loomed on either side. Down the first of these we plunged, but there was nothing in sight. Back again with a clash of protesting machinery, but it was no use. The suspect had made use of those seconds.

"He's given us the slip," said the Lieutenant, after we had explored at racing pace half a dozen lanes that clamoured for a ten-mile limit. "Five times out of six we catch them, but this fellow had a good start and he saw us at once. What would you like to do now?"

It was 3 a.m. "Cars 47 and 32; man terrorizing two people at ——" droned the radio.

"Let him go to it!" said I firmly. "They can't be nearly as frightened as I've just been."

"Well, what then?"

"Food, of course." A Jew, in an almost sky-blue suit, was selling

'hot dogs'<sup>1</sup> flavoured with garlic, under the flare of a naphtha lamp. "Let's buy him out," I suggested.

That was not the end of my acquaintance with Lieutenant Welling and the optimistic Lieutenant Katt. One evening, when I was dressing to go to a very special party, the telephone-bell rang. It was a police call, and within a few seconds I was connected with the squad supervisor at the Detective Bureau.

"I've been trying to get you before. You should come right down. There's a big show-up on and you'll surely be interested." The voice was so friendly and so convinced of my assent that I made only the most feeble protests.

"Oh, it's the real stuff and worth seeing. We were sure you'd be wanting to come." I imagined a faint disappointment in the voice over the wire, so I answered at once, "Of course."

"Make it snappy," said the Lieutenant. With a sigh of regret, for the most intelligent young man in Chicago had sent me orchids and another with less brains but more looks was due to call for me in ten minutes, I put down the receiver. Off came my best frock. Silver shoes were kicked under the bed. Thriftily—for I have not yet learned to treat orchids with disrespect—I put the exigent flowers into water, and in exactly eight minutes after Lieutenant Welling had urged me to hurry, I was in a yellow taxi speeding down-town.

At the police station 137 men and 4 women were paraded for identification upon a brilliantly lit platform. Below upon hard benches were crowded all the citizens who had recently been victims or witnesses of any form of violence. "Any identifications? Take your time, and speak up please," said the detective in charge. The respectable citizens looked uncomfortable and doubtful. They did not want to make a mistake. The habitual criminals upon the stage showed no feelings at all. "That's the usual bunch we get. They're in and out all the time," explained Lieutenant Katt at my elbow. But the hundred and thirty-seventh man was different. Slender and well-made, neatly dressed, clean and pitifully respectable, he looked like a clerk accustomed to being hungry. He wore his shabby clothes well.

"There must be a mistake," said one of the detectives. "That man's not a criminal." He hunted through the papers he held. Then the finger-print expert came in and there was a whispered conference.

The hundred and thirty-seventh suspect could not see what was happening across the footlights, but he must have guessed something, for his whole body drooped as if there were nothing inside it and he could hardly hold himself on his legs.

The detective looked up at him with interest and concern.

"There's a telegram just come through. That lad's escaped from a chain gang, and Florida is claiming his extradition. A hard break for him—we pulled him in on a trumpety charge made by some woman

<sup>1</sup> Sausages.



who's lost a brooch. Like as not, there was nothing in it, but we took his prints as a matter of routine, and if they fit he's for it now."

"But he's half dead already," I protested. "He's not the type who could stand a chain gang." The boy was taken away, his hands twitching. "Please let me speak to him. I must see if I can do anything," I appealed.

So in a small bare room with barred windows, I met James Larue and heard his story. At twenty he was a garage mechanic, but at heart an artist, taking courses at a night school. When he got his first work as an architectural draughtsman, he married. Then the slump came. With thousands of others he found himself on the streets. He did odd jobs as a sweeper, as messenger, anything to keep a roof and a bed. A friend offered the two of them a lift to Florida and they went, hoping to find some kind of employment in the summer camps. Near Miami a hotel-keeper gave them lodging in return for fourteen hours' work a day. They lived on scraps and what fruit grew wild.

"My wife was going to have a baby. She needed more food," said the boy. One day he broke into a deserted bungalow to steal some odds and ends of canned goods and stepped out into the arms of patrolmen. Trusting to a first offence, he pleaded guilty. Instead of a reprimand, he got five years in a chain gang. He could not stand it. A negress gave him a file, hidden in a fruit. He cut through his chains, hooked them together with wire covered by tinfoil and waited his chance. When it came—on road-work, with the nearest guard forty yards away—he threw himself into a marsh and lived there "three-parts under water" for a week. They trailed him with bloodhounds, but he stuck to the swamps, covering eighty miles before he came out. Hoboes showed him how to jump a goods train. He reached Chicago and got work. "Can you help?" he asked me with such desperation as I had never seen in any human being. "God! Can anyone help?"

I went back to my hotel and rang up the most puissant personage I knew. He was at the party I had forgotten. So I hurried into silver lamé and remembered the orchids. Later I had supper with the puissant personage. Sitting on a fat sofa, with cushions of all colours piled behind us and an English butler arranging caviare on a superlative table for two, I told him about James Larue.

"I don't know which is real, him or this," I concluded in desperation, "but they can't both be!"

The puissant personage wrote a name and address upon the back of the menu. "I don't suppose the man told you the truth. Once they're 'in', they never do. However, Grenville Beardsley is about the cleverest young lawyer in Chicago. He'll get Larue out if anyone can."

The case went on for months. In fact, there were three cases during which Larue remained in a Chicago gaol.

In the first court we won. Young Beardsley's eloquence roused a

wave of sentiment. Should the slavery, abolished by the guns of Bunker Hill, be revived in the chain gangs of Florida? Should a son of the North be surrendered to the lynch law of the South? On what legal point the judge chose to set aside the Governor's signature, I do not know, but the popular press supported the verdict. Caught in the general enthusiasm, the woman who had lost her brooch withdrew the charge against Larue. He was within reach of freedom when Florida appealed against what we should call "the magistrate's ruling".

I was in despair, for Larue did not make a good appearance in court. He was too weak, too much afraid. In one thing only he showed fight. He would not reveal his wife's address or the name under which she had found refuge. "I won't have her brought into it," he said. "She's done nothing, and she isn't going to be dragged into a police case." So he deliberately deprived himself of a weapon, for the warm-hearted Chicago public would have adored the spectacle of a twenty-year-old girl—with a baby, of course—fighting for her almost equally youthful husband's salvation from 'worse than death'—a description I have always suspected.

In the court of appeal we lost, as we were bound to do, for Larue had pleaded guilty to the Florida charge. No sentiment could weigh against the law as administered impartially by the high court judges. But Grenville Beardsley hung on. Press and public rallied to his support. One of the most famous American lawyers, long retired, offered his assistance. By what legal device I know not, but the case went to the Supreme Court. There we won it on a quibble. For the Florida authorities, suspecting no opposition, had hurriedly filled in the forms requiring the extradition of James Larue on a charge of 'breaking and entering', for which he had received a five . . . sentence. In their haste, they had omitted several necessary words, including a date, what the accused had 'broken and entered' and whether the sentence was for five days, months, or years. By these three slips James Larue was preserved from extradition.

The puissant personage, who was a cynic, said to me, "I hope he keeps out of trouble long enough for Beardsley to win his next case." Spike O'Donnell wired at great length to the effect that "English girls were certainly O.K."

Lieutenant Katt said nothing, except that the Law was fine if you knew enough of it. He shook my hand warmly and asked in what city I was next going to give the police "one grand time with not a blue moment in it!"

These were the high-lights of my American travels. They were incidental. For the rest I worked at my job. There were lectures and inspections of organized bodies—for the Press was making much of me—public lunches and dinners, interviews, impromptu speeches, visits to factories, hospitals and institutions. I worked very hard. I got very tired. The things I never enjoyed were night travel and the

intensity of central heating. But I found the States particularly interesting because of the hardships the ordinary people—workers and housewives—were enduring. It is strange now, in the full rush of wartime employment, to remember the desolation of 1933-34. 'To rent' boards blossomed like spring flowers. Houses were empty and unpainted, offices boarded up. Floor after floor of the new skyscrapers were unlet. Half my friends were 'out of a job', the others hanging on by their eyelashes. Hope was more plentiful than any other commodity. Americans knew they could not—and would not—be beaten. Their adaptability was astounding and their hospitality unmitigated.

Because of their own difficulties, I found my audiences unusually interested in other people's. South America had been through the same mill. For sixteen hours a day, in trains, in cafés and at quick-lunch counters as well as on platforms and at parties, I answered the same questions. Seriously I explained the over-prodigality of Latin-American soil and the Southern continent's problems of distribution. I spoke of Federation as opposed to Nationalist separation, and had great arguments with citizens who believed in isolation within their own point of view as well as their own industrial or agricultural region. My purpose was always the same. I still believed that knowledge is the equivalent of arms. I wanted to show not only what Europe or South America were doing, but why one country after another was led or forced into the actions which—in effect—have put an end to centuries of slowly developing civilization. This 'why' has always seemed to me important. It is not enough to speak of Axis control of the Balkans or Catholic South America's distrust of Russia. It is necessary to appreciate the human significance of such political eventualities. For the growths of to-day are deep-rooted in doubt and misery. They go back into the hearts and minds of men and women. Fear has certainly been the moving force of my generation. For security, it would have sold its soul.

Across half America I told of the Dictators who promised security as a new design for living and of democratic statesmen who hoped to maintain a system already battered, more by the years of peace than by those of war. I believed in revision of the Peace Treaties, in friendship with labouring Russia and in increasing Federation. In fact, I wanted to wipe the slate clean and begin again—co-operating the natural wealth and the vigour of all the Americas, with the experience of Europe and that stalwart genius of England which nobody can explain. For "Is God English?" or "Are the English human?"

1934

*German Work in South America. Germany's Versions of Hitler*

AFTER MY LAST LECTURE in New York, I got on to a Furness-Withy Line boat and went comfortably south to Buenos Aires. Before the war, the big shipping companies, always interested in travellers, generally gave me suites, so I was able to work in luxury and peace. Lady Essendon had decorated this particular liner. It was charming, rather like a simple, country house. Birds and flowers rioted over the chintzes in my sitting-room and there was a pleasantly solid table for the typewriter. I borrowed an engaging secretary from an amused Canadian oil magnate called Captain—now Colonel—Flanagan. The young man was long and pale. It was very rough and we got through three typewriters before my articles were finished. I was writing about the U.S.A. for England and for the great newspapers of South America. In Argentina *La Nación* and *La Prensa* are as powerful as *The Times* and probably more representative of material thought. I remember wedging myself into the heaviest chair while the delightful young man belonging to oil sat on the floor, the typewriter between his knees. "This is the last on the ship," he said. "It belongs to the purser. I say, do you think these articles will have enough movement in them? I am getting giddy, aren't you?" At intervals helpful stewards laid food around us, or Captain Flanagan, a most amusing man and always imperturbable, giver of wonderful parties in and out of his underground swimming-pool near Toronto, leaned through the window and encouraged us. "Lucky I can write my own letters," he laughed. "When you've finished my secretary and that machine of the purser's, I'll still have a few fountain-pens."

Hot and haggard, I apologized to the young man at my feet.

Damp but kindly, he explained that he was engaged to be married, so did not mind work. Stupefied, I waited for elucidation. "Keeps my mind occupied," he said. "I'd feel lonesome doing nothing." I suggested girls. There were plenty on board. The young man looked dismayed. One, he thought, was quite enough.

Argentina welcomed me with front pages in the English papers and inner columns in the Spanish. I was depressed. It seemed to me I did not make enough of opportunity. Prodigal of information—which bore fruit only in printer's ink—I realized that it would have no effect. Spanish-speaking South America was still oppressed by fear of Comintern activities—in the Universities, mines and factories, in the conscripted armies, on the docks and the vast undimensional estates. She

was suspicious of British imperialism and of North American finance. It is true that huge Anglo-Saxon companies controlled railways, land development and public utilities to an extent which, at times, suggested autonomy. But every republic had benefited by Anglo-American capital. Industry, mining and agriculture had acquired plans and machinery from Britain or the States. Scots had built and bridged, turning jungle or wilderness to production on a Biblical scale. Cockneys dealt with cattle by mobs of ten thousand 'on the hoof'. American experts had helped to create the mines which were literally towns underground. Braden Copper is an inhabited mountain. I saw it with three feet of snow and a modernist American settlement on top and a semi-tropical city inside. This is only one of the developments which have revolutionized production in the millionaire deserts or the prolific jungles of the vast southern continent. But by 1934, the Republics, amazed as well as depressed by the succession of slumps following over-production, were making the mistakes of nationalist Europe. They were piling up trade and customs barriers instead of demolishing them. If they had established some form of continental co-operation they could have dominated the world's markets with their unlimited raw material. But without planned production and co-ordinated trade they were at the mercy of what amounted to provincial distribution. While U.S.A. killed its hogs and ploughed up its grain, while Canada pulled in her belt and failed in her instalments on farming machinery, Brazil was burning coffee. Cocoa rotted in Venezuela, fruit and sugar in Argentina. Cattle remained unsold in Uruguay's unfenced pastures bleached by drought. Prices of wool in Patagonia fell as quickly as mercury in a thermometer. The millennium promised by black soil and red had gone wrong.

Into the resultant mixture of bewilderment and despair came Dr. Schacht's new 'planned economy'. Nazi organization was beginning to improve living-conditions in Germany. The Nazi Bund drew every German in South America into its insidious hold. The underground organizations were forming. Meanwhile, German traders had been instructed to give long credits, easy terms and goods at bargain prices. Nazi trade was thus reduced to blatant propaganda. But Berlin took care that merchandise for South America was delivered to time and to schedule. Hitler's commercial travellers were ambassadors of the Reich. They took an infinity of trouble and displayed a genius for individual psychology. I remember a radio merchant in Buenos Aires explaining to me, "When a German comes to do business, he is prepared to follow our customs. He will spend a morning if necessary drinking coffee before trying to sell me anything at all. He will send flowers to my wife, teach my son, perhaps, to fence. After that, you will understand, he becomes a friend on whom one can rely. The Americans are too hurried. They want to do business in a rush, and for them our market is only an extra. They will not alter their speci-

fications or their packing to suit us. Often we have to take what comes instead of what we want. With the British it is worse still. We have to accept what you think we ought to have, instead of what suits our needs—which are quite different from yours.”

I went to Uruguay to digest all this. In Carasco, a garden village on the edge of the Rio Plate, I lived among tall eucalyptus trees. I fell in love with the ‘extraordinary house’ and invented a story about it, ending as most things do in Uruguay with violence and amazement. I rode a great number of horses belonging to Hugh Grindley and allowed him to go on moulding my ideas about Britain in South America. The two lands so different seemed to me to share the future as if it were a canvas, the painting yet to be done. But Britain’s first concern was and must always be, her Empire. The U.S.A. could grow most of the crops her neighbours wished to sell. So Europe was the natural market for the great Southern republics—still in search of a future. And Europe—for the experimentalists, the universities, the intellectuals, the thinkers in big terms as well as for the merchants and economists—was beginning to mean Germany. When I left the Rio Plate in the late spring—their autumn—of 1934, young hot-heads and cooler heads too among the middle-aged, were reading Dr. Schacht instead of Karl Marx.

That summer, Arthur and I went as usual to Central Europe. We saw Czecho-Slovakia working hard—humourless perhaps, but keen and practical. We watched Sokol give her people physical health and strength. We saw her amazing factories and listened to beguiling music in her night-clubs. The old hill city of Prague was a dream—like Buda high above the Danube. The modern town spent her day in solid, serious work. Her nights were gay and wild. I was amused by the contrast—Russia and Vienna mixed I thought, cabbage soup and whipped cream.

We saw Germany just after the Roehm purge. It was something of a revelation. “In the Reich, there is only one opinion,” said the Nazis.

“In Germany,” retorted the intellectuals, “there is no opinion at all. The people are muddled. Eighteen months ago they were assured of the Millennium. It hasn’t arrived. They go on hoping, but they have ceased to think.”

Neither statement accurately represented the Germany we saw. Hitler had with him the vast majority of the middle class, the most active of German youth, the army which on the whole was then Liberal and a considerable proportion of the workers.

Against him were the landowners, the Communists, the intelligentsia who objected to the arts being shackled to propaganda, the peasant farmers who, under the new law of inheritance, felt themselves reduced to the position of life-tenants, the Jews and those Catholics to whom Rome was more important than their own country.

In Berlin a great industrialist, married to a Jewess, summed-up the

position by saying, "Hitler will never swallow the Junkers and one day he will die of indigestion."

He continued, "The Chancellor is a Biblical prophet, inspired by the Germany of Frederick the Great. He is too honest even to be practical. Goering is a freebooter, a typical soldier of the Thirty Years War, a good fellow who likes luxury, keeps a mistress and sympathizes with the upper class. Goebbels is the extreme Socialist, bitter, shrewd, and narrow. He would be more at home as a militant Communist."

The manager of a paint factory continued the theme:

"Hitler is the king of the middle class who have benefited by the elimination of Jewish competition. In politics he is your Ramsay MacDonald, converted by the financiers. His power in the country is remarkable. He can change his policy in a day and carry the people with him. By the stroke of a pen he can eliminate fifteen years of bitterness and make peace with Poland. He could disband the S.A. and remain their hero. His sincerity is a rock. And there is no one else." How strange it was now to remember such talk!

We spoke to an S.S. trooper who had been present during the executions in the Berlin barracks on June 30—the St. Bartholomew's Night of Nazi Germany. He said, "It was horrible, but it had to be done. Hitler risked his life when he went unarmed at five in the morning to Roehm's house at Wiessee. That is a gesture which appeals to us all. The rebels thought themselves so much in command of the situation that Herr Uhl actually put his hand on Hitler's shoulder to arrest him.

"The Führer hit him across the face and went upstairs alone to Roehm's room. While he was there two lorries full of the Chief of Staff's own guards arrived. Hitler went out on to the balcony and told them to return to Munich. They hesitated. The Führer faced them without even a revolver. 'You have only one leader,' he told them—and they went."

It was generally acknowledged by the many Germans whom we met, that Roehm's head had been turned by the acclamations which, as Hitler's right hand, he received wherever he went, and which he attributed to his own popularity. He lived 'as a Roman Emperor', but believed that his Socialist speeches and personal accessibility would cover the libertine luxury of his existence. He imagined he could carry with him the whole of the S.A., whereas in reality he could only count on his own group, addicted as they were to a common vice which had already made them extremely unpopular in the Party.

Hitler himself would not speak of plot or plotters. Roehm had been his most intimate friend, the only man who addressed him as 'thou'. To his mind, wholly concerned with his new Germany which he saw threatened by a plot, the thing was finished, and to make further reference to it would be to accord it an importance which it did not deserve. Hitler had been profoundly moved. He looked well, but his eyes were

quenched. "It was necessary," was all that he would say of June 30th.

Goebbels, on the other hand, said, "It was expedient," and Goering, supremely loyal to his Chief, "It was right."

Berlin had grown callous. A soap manufacturer said to me, "We are not nearly as much worried as the rest of Europe by a few executions. 'Clean up and have done with it' is the best thing from our point of view."

He added, "See you, under the Weimar Republic there was daily fighting between Nazis and Socialists. One could not go out at night for fear of robbery and worse. Now, at least, we have order. So if we hear that somebody has been shot at the other side of Berlin, it does not greatly concern us."

Others were not so stoical. A professor who had recently lectured on the 'rebirth of the German spirit', regretted in public that the Nazis used bullets instead of castor-oil after the fashion of early Italian Fascists.

A washerwoman, whose husband was a member of the S.A., said, "It seems that the Leader is not so well supported as we imagined. One wonders who will be the next to go."

A shopkeeper, with the swastika in his buttonhole, remarked, "It is not agreeable to be kept in ignorance of who is dead and who is alive."

The Junkers were cautious in expressing their misgivings, but the majority of them regarded Nazism with suspicion. They were afraid of losing political and social power together with their estates. They resented espionage and censored letters. Tapped telephones were irksome to people depending on what they regarded as the divine right of birth.

An important and unprejudiced member of this class, an ex-Minister, said to us, "So far, Hitler has been somewhat in the position of a Roosevelt struggling with an immense feudalism of industry and finance. Up to now, the forces of the Right have been too strong for him, but at heart he is as sincerely Socialist as he is Nationalist. And being sincere, he must put into action—as soon as power gives him the opportunity—those Left-wing principles which his Party expect."

So Germany, convinced that Hitler would get an enormous majority at the polls, waited with confidence or dismay for a programme in which it believed the accent would be on the Socialist aspect rather than the Nationalist. What it did not for one moment expect—ten years ago—was a cruel and unnecessary world war caused by the senseless ambitions of its Leader.

Yet in Bavaria, which seemed to me to have a little more sense of proportion than the rest of Germany, country landowners were worried about the future. Graf von Einsiedel dared to express the general fear of tolerant and well-educated people. At lunch, in his charming small house near Munich, he said, "Private vengeance has been satisfied in an abominable manner under cover of politics. Privacy



is at an end. We know we are watched by our own servants. Religion is ridiculed. In the schools they are teaching some ridiculous nonsense about Wotan and Thor. I do not know how it will end."

The venerable Herr von Kar had just been dragged out of a motor as he was proceeding peacefully along the high-road to his farm. With no one to protect him, he was clubbed to death by Nazis who had long resented his opposition to Hitler's 'beer-house push', when he was Governor of Munich in 1923-24.

A brother-in-law of the Einsiedels had been thrust into prison for no reason. Others of our Bavarian friends had been arrested by the Nazis and held for questioning. Their only crime was their religion and their old-fashioned democratic principles. Yet, behind the bitterness and the secret antagonism, there was a fairly general feeling that the tide had turned in Germany's favour. There was more employment. Prosperity was already in sight. We saw more smiles that summer than in preceding years. Even among those who abhorred the persistent persecutions and the purges of National Socialism, there was a hope that they were the excesses inseparable from revolution. The extremely able and far-sighted Mr. Gayner, British Consul-General in Munich, of whom we saw a good deal in succeeding years, thought that, on the whole, National Socialism would be good for Germany. The whole country, he said, needed discipline, self-respect and organization. All these, she was certainly getting—but with them a horrible confidence in force.

On a lonely road, we gave a lift to a pair of dusty and shabby young people who looked exhausted. We also gave them coffee and a meal. Over this, we became friends and they acknowledged that they were Communists. They wanted to 'go to ground' somewhere safe from the Nazis. So we took them on as far as we could, and they talked eagerly all the way. Communism, they assured us, would go on working in secret. It would be ready to play its part in a Germany liberated. They seemed to me impractical and pathetic. I was reminded of a fearful lunch in our Chinese dining-room in London, when an acquaintance, of extreme views, had insisted—in a loud and audible voice—that she could not enjoy her food if it was handed to her by "parasites". When she had left, I apologized for her ill manners to our butler, a very charming man familiar with most of Europe, its politics and languages. "She is very young and earnest," I explained. "And I think she is the head of some Communist revolutionary party——" "Perhaps, Madam, that explains why there is so little revolutionary Communism in England," said the butler. I felt he had scored heavily.

The waifs to whom we gave a lift seemed to me equally helpless in face of Germany's new politics. But we did the best we could for them. By the time we dropped them within reach of safety, they had

cheered up like children after the first chill of the party is over and plum buns are in sight.

Just after this episode we went to a party in Berlin. It was given by Max Fürstenburg and his beautiful dark young wife Gloria. Our host had read some moderate and very reasonable articles, biassed neither one way nor the other, which I had recently written about what I had seen in Russia the previous year. He took me into a small sitting-room—alone—to express his feelings. They were violent. "I do not care if it is the truth! If it is, you should not write it. It is treachery to civilization to say anything good about Russia."

Such argument was for me a battle-flag. "What nonsense!" I retorted. "My whole business in life is to write exactly what I see—good or bad. Truth is all that matters."

In the next five minutes we both lost our tempers. "There is a lot of good in Russia. I saw it everywhere——" I repeated. "I don't say it's all good. Of course it is not. But there is sound hard growth there——" Max interrupted, "I shall give your articles to the Führer. You should not be allowed to publish such stuff. There can be nothing good in Russia." Subsequently my books were banned in Germany. Even the French Albatross edition, printed in Leipzig, was obliged to delete from *Women Called Wild* the chapters which expressed my admiration for the working women of the Soviet Union.

#### CHAPTER XLIV

1934

#### *The Largest Prison in the World. French Guiana. The Admirable Louise*

BACK AGAIN TO SOUTH AMERICA, I went in the autumn of 1934. This time I sailed on an Italian boat by way of Dakar. How interesting it would have been had I been able to look into the future. For the French Governor took me round the forts which six years later prevented the British landing, and while he talked proudly of his guns, I longed to get back to the markets. They were extremely picturesque, and new to me. For all the West Coast gathered there, with wanderers from the Sahara and Mauretania. So skins were blue-black as well as brown. The women's faces were like grapes under their vivid, twisted turbans. There was flagrant joy in their smiles. Looking at them, I thought of fruit and laughter mixed.

In South America that winter I remember chiefly horses and the heads of cotton grass like cool white moths and the smooth sands of the River Plate which I loved. On a calm day the water was faint, brown silk, and the little waves rippled like lace on old-fashioned petti-

coats. The big bay I rode and could not hold, used to run away with me for the first mile. Then a river stopped him. If it did not, I had to turn him into the sea.

I liked the Uruguayans. They took the right things seriously—love and the land, history, courage and religion. In politics and murder they dabbled, sometimes with enthusiasm, at others with due regard to their unimportance. It depended on the wind. If it blew, torrid and insistent from the north, living became exaggerated. Peons used their knives and politicians their tongues. The latter were often the most effective.

One grey day, I flew north by Pan-American, which has mapped an aerial hemisphere. It was my first long flight. I found it monotonous, except when we went down to look at seals plopping off a rock, or scarlet ibis breaking out of Brazilian forest. I do remember one emotion. It was a dawn flight over the clouds. We had taken off from Rio before sunrise. When the light came it showed the whiteness of cotton-wool, tucked and ruffled below us. It was very cold and very still. Then the dawn came in flickers of fire. I saw it pouring out of the sky. It turned the cotton-wool clouds into a flower-bed. We flew above red roses. More and more of them were heaped about us. The colour was fresh and exciting. I imagined I could smell the scent of roses.

I think we flew for four days to French Guiana. It was then the largest prison in the world. Devil's Island, where Dreyfus had been confined, and Isle Royale with the barred and solitary penal cells, floated in heat-haze above a sea of glass. We came down in mid-river off Cayenne and were immediately sustained with steaming chocolate. The temperature was that of a hot bath.

The tragedy and the drama of Cayenne, its unexpectedness and the ridiculous things which happened as a matter of course, made a strong impression on me. I had foolishly decided that nothing could surprise me. Travelling was still enjoyable, but far more for what I learned than what I saw. That first enchanting feeling of everything being 'different'—and therefore wonderful and utterly satisfying—had gone with the years. I did not expect anything extravagantly new. But French Guiana certainly provided it—with the help of the Lamy family.

Cayenne itself was 'different'. Whenever I looked out of my window I saw convicts, in brilliantly striped pyjamas and enormous cart-wheel hats, doing nothing. Even this they did as slowly as possible. For hours they appeared to watch the vultures that hopped about on one leg, too gorged to rise. Or, with chins sunk and bare toes scrabbling in the earth, they watched nothing at all, except perhaps some private processes within themselves.

The hotel-keeper soon became my most intimate friend. He had, I suspect, left France for the good of his neighbours, but I do not know

if he had ever been in gaol. He was enormously fat. His belt with difficulty supported his stomach, and when he walked the whole of his body shook gently like a jelly insufficiently set. Moisture exuded from his small, deep-set eyes and from his thatch of dark hair which stood upright suggesting the bristles of a very expensive brush, but he had an amusing smile which slipped about among the folds of his face so that one never knew where it would next appear, and he was surprisingly active in chasing hens out of the bedrooms where they invariably roosted.

The ground floor was an estaminet, with a bar at one end of the long room and a billiard table at the other. Above, were half a dozen bedrooms opening on to an echoing corridor full of hens. At one end of this rose a structure reminiscent of the guillotine, but it was really a shower-bath. When anybody attempted ablutions under the perilously-swinging bucket which always upset at the wrong moment, the proprietor used to wobble upstairs. Bent as nearly double as his shape permitted, he would stare through one of the many cracks in the boarding, while, breathing gustily, he offered pertinent advice. "Pull in the other direction, Madame, not so hard! You are too much to the right! Softly now. The colour matters nothing. I assure you the mud here is very healthy. Ah, it sticks! A little jerk now. Ah-eel!" as a crash echoed through the whole building. For a bath always ended in the same fashion, 'unexpected' only by the proprietor. "*Voyons*, it is the fault of that animal of a *libéré*, who always misplaces the bucket, but I have iodine. One will apply it at once! There is not too much damage done?" Most guests preferred to remain unwashed.

Next door to the hotel a barber displayed a cheerfully-striped pole and the portrait of an unctuous blonde with sausages erupting all over her head. He also became a friend of mine, and I found his information most useful, for he had served six years in an inland gaol and was enduring the 'doublage', which was, in most cases, the worst part of a sentence to Guiana. For in prison the convict was sure at least of food and shelter, but when he was liberated he had to remain in exile within the borders of the penal colony for a similar period, or for life, if his sentence exceeded seven years. If he had friends to send him money, he could make for himself some sort of existence, but all labour was supplied by convicts, and there was no work left for the unfortunate *libéré* who could barely keep body and soul together. If he happened to be a technical expert, he might be able to find employment, but the ordinary criminal, accustomed to live on his wits, found himself with no chance but to steal in order to get back into prison, or to starve.

My friend the barber explained all this without self-pity. "For," said he, "I am an exception. You see that at once. I make money. I save. The ladies, they could not do without me. Even Mademoiselle Antoinette—the daughter of the Governor, and what a beauty—comes to me. I make her those curls all down the back of her neck which so

enchant the young Monsieur in oil who will no doubt be her fiancé."

Everybody in Cayenne was described as being 'in' some natural substance, oil, tobacco, pepper, or sugar, according to the nature of his occupation.

"And how," I ventured, "did you happen to be sent out here, for you are, as you say, possessed of most exceptional qualities."

The stilted compliment pleased him. With a flourish of the tongs with which he was preparing me for lunch at Government House, he exclaimed, "Ah, Madame, it was quite a small affair, a thing that might have happened to anyone—you yourself, for instance, although one sees you are a lady of heart and intelligence."

"Yes, yes, of course," I said confidentially, "and how did it happen?"

The barber sprang away from his lamp like a grasshopper. If he became any more excited, I thought, he would leave the floor altogether. "Figure to yourself, Madame, the misfortune, the disillusionment. Twice I tried to shoot my wife's lover, and twice I killed the wrong man!"

With tongs raised, he waited for my condolences. I hoped they sounded hearty. "Evidently it was not an ordinary crime, that——" concluded the little man, springing lightly round my person, dusting combings, flicking off the more pertinacious insects, never still for a moment.

When I reached Government House the first thing Mlle. Antoinette, ravishing certainly, with her blue-black hair close curled on her neck, the bloom of a very sophisticated sixteen on her absurd and delicious face, and a mouth composed of pomegranates and hibiscus, said to me was, "They all say they have murdered their mistresses. It is a respectable crime." She added that she did not like the striped "zebra-men". "They exasperate me. They get on my nerves, and what a bad red in those stripes! One could have been artistic at least!"

Antoinette was ripe for mischief. If the young man in oils did not bestir himself, she would make more trouble than all the assassins who composed the household put together.

We went in to lunch. Madame, very brown, smiling and effective, sat in the middle of the burdened table. His Excellency, more reserved, sat opposite.

The three daughters arranged themselves as near as possible to the sweets they preferred. They all had the healthiest appetites.

Madame talked gaily over the beheaded flowers in great heaps of red and yellow down the table. "All our servants are assassins. We prefer it so. For with a thief one never knows. At any moment he may begin to steal again. But with a murderer once is usually enough. It is finished and one knows where one is." She nodded her brisk, dark head and took a second helping of the superbly-cooked fish

offered by an Annamite with a face like a locked box. The small, secret, olive-skinned man went round the table carrying the big dish decorated with petals, and the eldest daughter, helping herself liberally, said, "All the same, *Maman*, one must remember they do sometimes make a nuisance of themselves. You recollect when the kitchen-boy tried to kill the cook, and that one escaped with the blood pouring out of his head! Where must he go, pursued by the scullion, but into little Georgie's bedroom? Imagine, *Madame*, my small sister waking up and finding one about to kill the other over the rosebuds on her counterpane!"

It needed some imagination.

"What did you do?" I asked the stolid child, less attractive than the other two and rather red after a mixture of strong condiments.

"But what do you think? I told them it was not possible. If they were determined on an assassination they must find a spot more suitable." With head bent over her plate, she ate quickly and neatly.

"You are greedy," said her mother with affection.

"No, but I do not waste my food. It is good and there are not many good cooks in the Guyanes."

At my elbow stood a slight brown man offering steak garlanded with orange and yellow vegetables. When I found it needed cutting he took the knife from my hand. His eyelids, satin-smooth and fringed with soft lashes, hid his eyes. His lips were gentle and very young. I wondered in what manner he had killed. Then I saw how he held the knife, and there was no need to wonder any more.

The eldest daughter soon showed that she possessed a strong character. Like her mother, she was plump and immensely energetic, but there the resemblance ended, for *Madame* was tolerant and intelligent. Her gaiety came from a fundamental vitality which carried her splendidly over all obstacles. But Louise, I suspected, was narrow as well as forcible. She had little imagination, but she knew what she wanted and went straight for it.

When I asked permission to go into the interior, beyond the borders of the penal colony, to the new land with its attractive Indian name that France, with the aid of hundreds of peaceful little Annamite convicts, was forcibly tearing from the jungle, Louise said at once, "It is better, Papa, that I go with her."

Somewhat disconcerted, I studied the smooth, pink and white young woman with well-arranged yellow hair and a body far too developed for her age. She would be of use, I thought, when practical comforts were concerned, but what should I do with her—on high heels—in the forest?

"Do you like walking?" I asked.

"I never take a step if I can help it," she replied.

But I had not fathomed the resources of the cool, honey-coloured Louise. The first thing she did was to commandeer the greater part of

the local bus which ran inland for some forty or sixty miles from the river bank—nobody seemed to know the exact distance. "You must get up at five—no, four will be better. Then we can meet at a quarter past on the quay." The margin for washing and eating seemed to me small, but with the assistance of the proprietor, who, breathing in stentorian gusts, shook me awake about three, I succeeded in reaching the river with the dawn.

There was nobody there. An hour later, however, several officials arrived to see us off, and we made awkward conversation till, about six, Louise, looking like Britannia in a sun-helmet, arrived in a car laden with provisions. "It occurred to me that we should take a mouthful with us," she explained.

Terse, I agreed. We embarked in an official launch. Several young men, unshaved, but with suits freshly laundered, took off their pith helmets and wished us fervently *bon voyage*. In half an hour we reached the spot from which the bus should have started. It was not there.

"What a surprise!" said the magnificent Louise.

I had never seen such a bosom in starched pink and white cotton.

"It must have gone hours ago," I retorted with the utmost gloom, but Louise thought this improbable, and she was right.

A crazy wooden estaminet hung above the road. On it a couple of Frenchmen were engaged in the local pastime of killing time. They were not even drinking. One of them called to us that the bus had not yet arrived. The other added that there was no hurry as the priest who would certainly travel on it had just this minute been called away as there had been "a little accident". A child had chopped its foot in half while trying to split sugar-cane.

Towards nine the longed-for vehicle arrived, and a swarm of blacks and browns poured into the back of it. Social precedence demanded that Louise and I, not to speak of the priest, should have seats to ourselves. Besides which we had paid our fares and brought a good deal of luggage. So a violent argument ensued. At least it began in violent fashion with the two Frenchmen and Louise laying hands on the nearest natives and pulling them out head first, but when the priest arrived the whole matter was raised on to a spiritual plane. Father Bénédict's manner sufficed to arrange everything.

In time, when we had long ceased to look at our watches, we started, the priest, Louise and I, and the half-caste wife of a French warder, on the two front seats. For hours and hours—I haven't the faintest idea how many—we drove through pleasantly-civilized forest, by which I mean that the vermilion-red road, deep in mud, ran gaily between green walls, but green walls broken by clearings where red flowers bloomed round delicious thatched huts and other red flowers sprawled over pigsties and the verandahs of tin stores. On the verandahs sat fat women with sewing-machines and thin men in new canvas chairs.

"It is all very grand, is it not?" said the priest. "Look especially at the names and the pictures on those tins of foods piled underneath the tin roofs!"

Louise proudly explained, "It is progress, yes? Some of those men are *libérés*, but I prefer the blacks. They are better to look at and they have not the prison smell."

Midway to the next river the road plunged into real forest and came out in a swamp. "Here are the outer walls," said Père Bénédict in a charming, cultivated voice. "Beyond these, few can escape."

I noticed some water-buffalo wallowing in slime, and the priest pointed to them. "Those animals know how far it is safe to go, but men are not so sensible. Fear drives them into these marshes and they never come out."

He sounded kind and sad, so I took advantage of the moment to ask, "But they do get away sometimes, don't they?"

"From the north, not so seldom as the officials would have you believe," replied the priest with a touch of malice. "Many convicts are employed in timber camps far out in the forest. They are to all appearances free, and there is only the river between them and Dutch Guiana. They try to cross it at night on rafts or tree-trunks. Some of them are drowned, some shot by the guards, but without doubt some get away."

"What happens to them then?" I asked, before Louise, who evidently disapproved, could interrupt.

"They die of starvation in the Dutch jungles, which are just as cruel as ours, or they are killed by poisonous snakes, or they lose themselves and go mad, or—if they are very hardy and very fortunate—they make their way to some bush village, and in time become respectable citizens in one of the mining towns. Not so long ago an escaped convict used to keep the best hotel on the Paramaribo river."

Louise intervened with, "There is no reason why they should escape. If they behave themselves they are better off here than in any European prison. Imagine, there are twenty or thirty in a ward. They can read and play cards, smoke, drink if they have enough money to buy the local wine, pay their two sous for a cup of coffee, and make as much conversation as they like. Yet they are criminals, remember, most of whom are fortunate to have escaped the guillotine. You must agree, Father, that only the very bad come here."

The priest looked at us gravely. "I ask myself often," he said, "if one can say of any man 'he is very bad', or only 'at that moment he acted very badly'."

Convicts sailed us across a river. On the opposite bank, a youth in a smart white suit, very much pressed, his hair like oil silk, hurried to meet us.

Followed by the convicts carrying our luggage, nine-tenths of which consisted of Louise's 'mouthful' of food, we walked along a soft mud



track, deeply red, between neat wooden houses inhabited by warders and other prison officials. Flowering trees hung over us and petals were strewn upon the road. In the distance we could see our destination—the famous, or infamous, Penitentiary of the Rocks, where hardened offenders are sent. But before we reached it the sleek young man said, “Here is my house and my dog and, more important, my cook. Ah, what a trouble I have to keep him, Mademoiselle Louise. Every woman in the place has tried to take him away from me, but I shall appeal to your father. I cannot lose Bernard.”

He led us across a strip of garden to a three-roomed bungalow looking on to the great, flat rocks of the estuary. Waist-deep in the water beyond them, some Annamites, naked to the loins, were fishing with nets which they threw, fan-shaped, upon the surface and allowed to sink before they pulled them in.

“Is there no danger from sharks?” I asked.

“A great deal, but the Annamite is not afraid. Give him a knife and he will defeat the biggest monster between here and the islands.”

“They are convicts?”

“Yes, but one can hardly think of them as such. They are so quiet. They make no trouble at all.” He paused to offer us drinks.

In a whitewashed room we sat round a table trimmed with marigold heads. The inimitable Bernard cooked and served a meal worthy of Larue’s, but such minor efforts did not prevent him from entering into and indeed dominating the conversation.

“Madame is from London? That is where I shall go when I am free—in one quite little year and a half. That will soon pass, *hein*? It is not that I have suffered here. As the best cook in the Colony I could take my choice, and I despair to think of all those who will miss me, but one must make one’s career, is it not so?”

I ventured to ask what slight accident had interfered with the same career in France.

The round, red-faced, good-natured man shrugged his shoulders. “Monsieur knows that,” he said. “*Eh bien*, when one is young one cannot always avoid making a fool of oneself!”

While he went into the pantry for a condiment our host explained, “He is not really a criminal. He drank a few glasses too much during a fête at Marseilles, with the result that he knocked some stranger over the head with a bottle. The man had the bad taste to die, and his father was a municipal official with influence. But Bernard will go back to France with savings in his pocket, and as for us, our stomachs will suffer.”

After lunch we ‘reposed ourselves’, which meant that I dutifully lay upon a camp-bed and stared at the flies on the ceiling, while, in the sitting-room, the other two amused themselves with an odd mixture of childishness and decorum. Then we went to see the farm, or rather the lands spreading for miles into the jungle on which the prisoners

were experimenting with cereals, fruit and the breeding of water-buffalo.

It rained, I remember, in the wholehearted fashion of the tropics, and I disliked seeing convicts drenched and shivering, their hats turned into soaked sacking, their ludicrous pyjamas glued to their bodies. I wondered how they got dry.

"When they return to gaol, about six or seven, they take off their clothes."

"What do they put on?"

"Nothing," said our guide, surprised.

At sunset we made our way up to the stark buildings on the rocks. Within the wall were several bungalows occupied by the officials on duty. The largest was reserved for the Governor, who, as well as ruling the Colony with its large native and half-caste population, its Arab and Indian traders, its bush-blacks descended from run-away African slaves, its Chinese and its Indians, is the final Court of Appeal for some 20,000 convicts scattered over several hundred miles of forest gaol. The bungalow was surrounded by verandahs and a thicket of hibiscus.

The bedroom allotted to me contained a table with a tin basin and jug, several domestic utensils not usually displayed, an iron stretcher bearing a flock mattress, the hardest blankets I have ever felt, and a pillow like a porcupine, for a good deal of the straw stuffing protruded through the cover. When I entered, I found a gentle old man in the ubiquitous stripes wandering around with a posy of half-dead flowers. He gave them to me with a vague smile, after which he offered me a bath. "But it is not very safe," he explained, "for it will not keep up. It is better to stand outside while you pull the rope."

With memories of the hotel bath, I said that I quite understood. The old man, who looked as if he had no flesh left, leaned against the table and watched me while I unpacked pyjamas and a tooth-brush. I asked him how long he had been in Guiana.

"How should I know?" he said. "Ten years at first, then another ten, for there was a fight in prison and a warder was hurt——"

From the way he said it, I imagined that the word 'hurt' was a euphemism and that it probably resulted in six foot of tropical earth for the official, and at dawn, the guillotine flanked by rows of sickened, resentful men, kneeling in the wet mud that added to their humiliation.

"I was not in it, but I had a knife——" continued the small dry rag of a creature whom I can hardly think of as human.

"How did you procure it?"

His eyes held a child's slyness. "They make them at the forge when the warders are not looking, and the handles come from one of the carpenter's benches. It is not so difficult, that. But to get a knife through the gates one must bribe the keeper, who is himself a *condamné* promoted for good behaviour. They search us each day as we go in, so——" He ran his skeleton hands down his back and sides. "But

if the gateman is a friend, he takes care not to feel along the spine, or under the thigh, and there the knife lies safe as an infant unborn."

The grey man looked as if he would like to smile, but had lost control of the necessary mechanism. He moved the basin an inch nearer the edge of the table. "That was long ago," he said. "I have forgotten how many years. Now I am on good behaviour. I look after this bungalow and I can pick the flowers." Wistfully he looked at the drooping bunch I had forgotten to put into water.

Ashamed, I arranged them in a tumbler, and, still more ashamed I asked, "Will you tell me why you were sent here?"

"Oh, that was a quite little affair, Madame—the smallest possible assassination."

I do not remember much about dinner that night. I think we ate dried fish and buffalo meat downstairs in a barren room looking on to bushes and a multitude of fireflies. But afterwards there was some argument as to how we should sleep. Louise, less assured, suggested we should share a room, but I thought the flock mattress would be sufficient obstacle to repose, and I insisted on her occupying the state chamber which contained a surprising amount of rotund enamel ware.

"I shall not close an eye," she protested, and I knew she envisaged a succession of *hommes-zèbres* crawling along the verandah to steal and slaughter.

Sighing, I resigned myself to an impossible night. Louise completed my gloom by saying, "Madame, since it is improbable that I shall sleep, you can rely on me to call you. As soon as I can see, I will knock on the wall."

"Now why on earth," I protested coldly, "should we start so early? It is not much more than a hundred miles to Sinamari."

"It is better to be prepared," insisted Louise, shutting her small mouth. The young man, who had decided he must accompany us in order to inspect some agrarian enterprise on the way back, hastened to agree with her. "Yes, yes, one must always be in advance of the hour."

I went to bed. The mattress defeated me. It was like trying to relax on a potato heap. So I put a rug on the floor and rolled my coat into a pillow, and while I still wondered if I could possibly snatch a few moments' sleep, I heard sounds that I attributed to the young man's revolver. But it was only the old convict shaking the shutters without daring to push them open.

"Madame, madame, you will not wake and the bell has rung this long time. Mademoiselle and the young Monsieur have gone to pick bananas for breakfast, and there has been a little disaster with the bath, but the big Pole is even now mending it, and if Madame finds herself so dirty that she must wash, he or I can hold the tank on the beam—but he is much stronger than me—so that Madame can have a shower without fear for her head."

"Thank you a thousand times," I said, "but perhaps a little water here will suffice."

An hour later we started for Sinamari, whither Père Bénédict, in whose house we were to spend the night, had preceded us. In order that the young people could continue the flirtation in which they delighted, I said I would sit beside the warder who drove the lorry. So we started. After a few miles the road became a matter of hillocks and pot-holes, and the convict shouted that his stomach was weak and he could not stand so much movement. He jumped down and ran beside the lorry, insisting that he must share my seat.

"Try sitting on the back, Madame. You will find you have no inside left."

But I was unsympathetic. "You are a man and ten years younger than me. I don't see why you're making such a fuss," I said, and with the permission of the warder, I gave him some cigarettes. Almost crying, he retired to the back of the lorry.

While subdued laughter came through the waterproof curtain behind us, and the young man's voice saying, "*Voyons, Mademoiselle*, you will be more comfortable with my coat behind your back—like this, so!" the driver, who was young and intelligent, explained, "That sort of *condamné* is soft as goat's butter."

We arrived at Sinamari towards dusk, for we had had several punctures and the magneto had given trouble, while the road had on occasions disappeared altogether in an expanse of scarlet mud which Louise insisted would engulf us. In the dusk then, heavy with scent, the smoke of native fires and the flicker of bats' wings, we drove into the straggling village, saw the dim shapes of huts crouched under their shaggy thatch and the outlines of a few whitewashed buildings determinedly superior, and following the river bank, came to the neat and homely dwelling of Père Bénédict. His housekeeper, a native woman with many starched skirts, a cross upon her breast and her grey hair tormented into an imitation of European fashion, rustled out to meet us, explaining that her master was in church; within a few minutes he would return. Meanwhile supper was cooking; there would be a bottle of good wine, and we must see our rooms wherein she had put everything we could possibly require.

It was true. The rooms were pleasant and clean. We found a sufficiency of soap and candles and there were no holes in the mosquito netting. Having ejected a frog, three beetles of inordinate size and the fiercest appearance and a centipede nearly as long as a ruler—and having failed to dislodge a family of bats from the rafters—I went downstairs. Louise and Father Bénédict were sipping a cordial and talking about the church, of which the priest was architect and chief mason. "We quarry the stone ourselves," he said, "and hew it into the right-sized blocks—you cannot think how clever my people have become. I stand there with my spirit-level and a piece of string and the walls

go up higher and higher every day. We have erected a building complete with windows and the beginnings of a tower with no more science than a plummet, a ruler, and a ball of twine." Triumphantly, Father Bénédict emptied his glass. "The Government refused to help me. They said I had not enough parishioners. But I said to myself, 'First the church, then the congregation.' And already I have my flock. It is their church, their own, for they have built it themselves, and as such, it is worth more to them than a state cathedral." Later, while we ate, with avidity, the excellent omelette, the stew, delicious but probably of feline origin, we spoke of the *condamnés* whom we had left behind at Les Roches and should find again in greater numbers at St. Laurent. "The double, yes, it is sometimes cruel," reflected the priest, "but it was intended to give a man a chance to re-establish himself. The majority of convicts are not fit to return to a civilized country as soon as the prison door opens for them. Listen, Madame, I have been asked so often to give work to *libérés* without a blot upon their prison record. From the description of Monsieur the Director one would think they were angels with every feather whitewashed." Père Bénédict smiled, showing strong square teeth. He picked them effectively as he continued, "Twice I accepted them as servants. The first ran away with the offertory, pennies and halfpennies, mind you, contributed by these poor savages, and the second sold the few spare clothes I had and all my hens to a rascally Syrian going over the border."

I agreed that these particular experiments had not been very successful, but I asked, with an earnestness that amused Louise, "Are there no exceptions? It is a fearful indictment of the system if everyone goes bad under it."

The priest set down his empty wine-glass. "The old corrupt the young, and they in turn take pride in destroying what is good in the boys who come out here with only one idea—to escape. It is the truth, Madame, that among all the *condamnés* I have seen, there is not one of whom I could say, 'That man I can trust.' For there is something which eats into them and destroys them. They go soft like this fruit." He held out an over-ripe alligator pear.

I was tired. The front seat of the lorry had been all that the driver predicted. Conscious of an aching back and knees still stiff, I said to Louise, "I suppose it doesn't matter what time we start to-morrow," for we were going up the Sinamari river in a cement barge with an outboard motor.

"You will not be able to sleep through the Angelus," she retorted, "and that is at five. I believe *mon Père* rings it from his bed."

In darkness I went up to my room under the rafters. The bells were exactly overhead. Perhaps, I thought, the good Father would oversleep. Something furry scuttled across my feet. Something else squealed and slithered along a beam. Resigned, I lit a candle and



Sir Kinshan Cornwallis, Ambassador to Iraq; the late King Feisal; and Rosita Forbes

#### MILESTONES

Group including Marchese Patrizi, Lady Louie Mountbatten, Lady Brecknock, Col. Geoffrey Glyn, Rosita Forbes, Miss Mary Ashley, Princess Theodora of Greece, Lady Mount Temple



Keystone



1 In Ecuador 2 Edith de Bonneuil comes to see me in London after her flight to Kufra 1931 3 Leaving Pan-American plane in Guatemala 4 With Clare Sheridan—surprisingly in England

THE WORLD IS AS WIDE AS A MAN'S IMAGINATION

1 Fox Photos

2 G.P.A.



sought for the long-handled broom which the priest's housekeeper had provided for such emergencies.

The bed was comfortable and I rolled myself away from the netting so that no vampires—those small bats with a wing-spread of twelve inches—could make a meal of me while I slept. It was deliciously quiet. Not a sound came from the lane that separated the house from the river bank. Then crash, clatter, bang! The bells were pealing over my head. Five o'clock! Bewildered by the clamour, I blundered on to the floor, stubbed my toe on a loose board and looked for my watch. It had stopped.

By the light of a candle I dressed. It seemed to me unusually dark, yet the sky, where a handful of stars lingered, was fortunately clear.

Louise, neatly brushed and powdered, had drunk most of the coffee by the time I descended. "You are late," she said, "but here are your eggs and some bananas. We will take the rest of the bunch with us."

I objected to this habit of hoarding food, but Louise always replied, "One must make provision," so we travelled surrounded by paper packets, bags and bottles filled with alien liquids.

Father Bénoit was saying matins, or whatever is said before the dawn, so, having adjured his housekeeper to express to him our gratitude—I noticed mine was much more fervent than Louise's—we set out along the river, still in darkness.

"What is the time?" I asked impatiently.

Louise did not hear. She was talking to the boatmen who protested, with respect, at the amount of packages for which they had to find place. However, we settled ourselves at last on top of the cement bales, and after several false starts, the outboard motor consented to function and we went chugging upstream. It was delicious as the night withdrew, leaving a faint sheen on the water and a suggestion of heavy veiling between us and the jungle, which, with a thousand small sounds, began to separate into animal and vegetable entities.

After we had progressed a few miles the sky turned green, and against it the palms looked like smoke. Parrots screeched across the river. Curiously-shaped animals came down to drink.

"I can't understand it at all," I repeated, feeling like Alice in the Looking Glass. "It must be seven now and the sun hasn't risen."

Louise, imperturbable in spite of the cement which was harder than anything else I have ever sat upon, said, "The dawn comes late here."

For a while I considered the statement, wondering for how many more phenomena the tropics would be responsible, but it was not till an hour later, watching a spectacular sunrise, that I realized what had happened.

"Louise," I said coldly, "at what time did you persuade Père Bénoit to ring the Angelus?"

"Madame!" she protested, and then with a pout, "Truly, it was so



little earlier than usual and you must avow it is exquisite now on the river."

Louise—and my husband—have been most successful in getting me up at outrageous hours. What a lot of dawns Arthur's liking for 'plenty of time' lest things go wrong, have forced me to see! Dawns certainly are beautiful and they are never alike. But they are always uncomfortable, whether as an end or a beginning. My Spanish blood makes me lazy. I do not like getting up—out of a proper bed with a room around it—unless there is light outside. Of course, if I am sleeping—exiguously—in the open, it does not matter. The sooner out of a flea-bag, the better. Breakfast beside a camp-fire and horses, or camels, makes the effort worth while.

## CHAPTER XLV

1934

### *Arthur, 'Jane', and British Guiana*

WHEN LOUISE LAMY had finished with me, I flew on to British Guiana to join Arthur, who had come out on a fruit boat from England. In the 'plane I had been telling some newly acquired American friends how irresistible I considered him. Politely they expressed themselves eager to meet him. On the float, at Georgetown, I recognized a tall, grey figure, but it was spreading far more than usual. Dismayed, I looked down upon my attractive husband in a flannel suit not unlike a maternity dressing-gown. "Where did you get it?" I asked with concentrated rage, barely out of his arms. For I do enjoy looking at Arthur, especially when I am very dishevelled and crumpled by travel. "Don't you like it?" asked my husband, not in the least upset. "It was off the peg, very comfortable and roomy in this heat." "There's room in it for anything," I said, and introduced him to my good-looking Americans.

In spite of their own chic, they seemed indifferent to Arthur's fluidity of shape. Afterwards, they told me he was even nicer than they had expected. "It's so unfair to be Irish," I said, "and to have that voice." The delicious Philadelphians looked puzzled.

I went on resenting Arthur in his grey flannel bulges—until one day he recklessly strayed off the golf course into the long grass. This can only safely be done in British Guiana after a strenuous application of carbolic soap. Arthur had been—as usual—optimistic and omitted this rite. The red 'bichus'<sup>1</sup> were delighted. They moved families and households into his legs. Next morning, most of him looked like Vesuvius in eruption. I was terrified. Even the doctor said it was 'a good

<sup>1</sup> Scarlet ticks.

case'. We had intended to fly up-country with a gallantly experimental young pilot, called Williams, to see—with ease and comfort—the highest waterfall in the world. But the 'plane had gone off into the forest to search for a prospector whose wife was dangerously ill in Georgetown. It had to make a forced landing on a river. Nobody knew whether its owner would be alive or dead. They took it calmly. Young Williams was accustomed to achieving the impossible. He could be counted on to turn up—with his last drop of petrol and a missing engine.

So while the scarlet ticks nested happily in Arthur's legs and the doctor treated them with eloquence and black ointment, I made arrangements to go by land to the Falls. Transport was in the hands of the most delicious young woman, whose name I have forgotten, so I shall call her 'Jane'. She impressed me so much that I wrote a novel about her, under the title of *The Golden Vagabond*. For she was faintly gold all over, with pale hair, turning up, softly, like a duck's tail, under a battered panama hat. When life was more than usually difficult she wore orange shorts, brief as a man's handkerchief. Jane said she would come with us. We were, she told us gravely, 'the first celebrities' to visit the Kaieteur Falls. We tried hard to look the part, but I was still discouraged by the maternity suit which Arthur most enjoyed.

The first part of our journey was by river steamer and very pleasant, in spite of the damp heat. Jane was concerned with lists of stores. She licked the stub-end of a pencil and added supplementary notes. She had thought out twenty-one different menus. "And for tea, there's biscuits," she said. "Three kinds; d'you think that's enough?" I said. "Splendid, and couldn't we buy fruit at the riverside villages where the steamer pauses?" "Bananas won't keep," said Jane. She was very grave. Beside her hovered a devoted black called Percy. He could do anything—except cook.

We spent a night at a frame 'hotel' looking at itself in the river. We ate mosquitoes in coffee and mosquitoes in hard-boiled eggs for breakfast. Then we piled into a truck with our baggage and plunged into the jungle. For twelve hours we bumped about all over that vigorous vehicle, within a tunnel of green which never changed. Night came. The track was reduced to the disc where the headlights met. It slipped away in front of us, leaving us imprisoned between rough green walls. For a hundred miles there was no break. Giant dock leaves swelled out of the undergrowth. Monstrous creepers hung from the trees. On the tailboard of the lorry Percy perched like a crow. Round his neck he wore his tame racoon. It ate anything, but preferred soap. At intervals he crawled forward to offer us rum and to say, "You all not been gone done got too tired?" For he enjoyed past tenses in English as much as his tame animal liked upsetting anything he suspected of containing pink, scented soap.

In pitch darkness we came to a log hut which was the rest-house. Another blue-black came to greet us. Portentously he murmured in Jane's ear. "It doesn't matter," she said. "We can get them out with a broom handle."

"What?" I asked.

"There's a nest of vampire bats in the roof. You take the last room—on the left there. Then you'll be all right." I thought this was sheer nobility until I realized that the partitions between the cubicles were hardly higher than my head. So the vampires could range at will. I hoped they would prefer Jane's blood to mine. Arthur's I felt was safe. It had been 'proofed in the cask', as it were, by the red beasties in Georgetown.

Up-river we went in an outboard motor-boat. I forget how many days we spent in it, but whenever we came to rapids, we had to lift our small craft out of the river and portage it, with the engine and our stores, through the forest till we came to another smooth reach. Then we took to the river again and chuffed up slowly against the tide, with the forest closing on the water's edge and the ranges which held the Brazilian frontier rising in the distance. It was still, hot and breathless—except for crickets or toads and, in the evening, the 'red' howling monkeys which made sound hideous.

We spent the last night at the foot of the plateau, and before sunrise bathed in the river, while Percy's racoon scuttled at the edge chattering for soap. Jane, soft, sweet, deliciously serious, arranged the porters' loads. "They're all off," she said as she cut slices of bread and put bacon between them. "We'd better start. There's a straight mile to begin with. You can't miss it—right along the river. Then it's pretty steep. Don't take the cliff too fast, but we ought to be up before the sun. Otherwise it'll be awfully hot."

At our own special and different paces, we tramped through the forest. When we came to the cliff, I felt like a beetle—an inexperienced one. For there was a lot of it—in places, perpendicular. Jane went first, placing her feet with care. Percy followed, the racoon gibbering at his ear. The black swung about like a monkey, telling us where to step and how to disentangle ourselves when we had mixed our feet and hands. Before the two or three hundred yards which needed real care, we had a drink. Then I shut my eyes, opened my mouth for as much air as possible and struggled up, splayed like a spatchcock on toast. Arthur followed—with dignity. I think by this time he had substituted brown slacks and a ravishing blue shirt for the concertina folds of his 'gents' neat suiting'. Anyway, he looked terribly clean and impressive.

"Whew, that was tough," said Jane. Empurpled and panting, I agreed. Arthur snorted. He always does when I make a fuss.

The last rest-house was built within a few yards of the edge of the cliff. From it the Fall was visible. In a single stupendous arch the

entire river flung itself off the plateau where the forest stretched unbroken to the borders of Brazil. Over eight hundred feet of rock it thundered into a hollow torn out of the gorge. All we could see below was foam and huge, glittering trees darkly green. Out of these came flights and flights of birds nesting behind the fall. What was so lovely about this rush of water was that it was not white or grey. It held all the colours of amber and rusted metals in a sheath of crystal. I could not believe that a river could be like wine and jewels. But Kaietur Fall in sunshine was so beautiful that I could only bear to see it alone. Whenever Jane and Arthur were doing something sensible and useful, I slipped away to lie flat on my face on the edge of the cliff. From there, in comfort, I could watch the smooth, shining, pewter-coloured river, making that wonderful arch clear as glass, with colours unrecognizable and quite indescribable inside it. Endlessly the miracle repeated itself. Enchanted, I craned over the edge to see the arch break into spray and mist. Out of this, drenched rocks and branches thrust with stark austerity. Nothing could have been grimmer than the effect they made. For there was no light below except the reflection from the water.

Kaietur was responsible for the success of the party. For it was colder than we expected and we had not enough bedding. It was also very wet, for the wind was in the wrong direction. Drenched with spray we lived in a dream. Wrapped in blankets we ate chill food. For Percy's cooking was composed of good intentions, but he had forgotten most of the ingredients which would have turned them into fact.

Mist blanketed the escarpment when we left. As we splashed across the rocks, stubbing our toes, I shivered and said, "I wish we hadn't to do the same journey back, I don't like repetition."

Arthur lent me his macintosh. "I dare say Jane'll contrive a few variations for you," he said.

By the time we had got through the forest the sun was up. The cliff looked to me very sheer. Half a dozen bush-blacks, carrying hillocks of luggage, dropped placidly over the edge. Arthur followed them and waited, easily balanced—upon nothing—while Jane took a stone out of her shoe. Then the two of them walked down, talking deliberately about things far away and unimportant.

"That's a pretty good show," I thought as I pulled my cart-wheel hat down so that I should not see too much. Far below, the blacks were dropping from rock to rock like young locusts. I did not enjoy the next half-hour. For it was very hot and my worn soles slipped, and Percy, sweating heavily, his coffee-berry tints faded to a liverish grey, insisted on slithering beside me offering agitated and contradictory advice, all in past tenses. In the end, I came down like an infuriated crab, with elbows and knees dug in as if they were claws and a lot of earth in my mouth. Arthur got his own back for the 'maternity suit'.

He was sitting at the bottom, clean and composed. My belt had burst, some buttons had gone. Wondering if enough were left, I pulled myself—and what remained of my stout linens—together. Nothing seemed quite adequate in the matter of cover.

I knew that Arthur was just going to offer me his despised flannel coat—when Jane collapsed. She did it neatly and with finality. We had to restore her with rum. "I felt awful this morning," she confessed. "So I put on my orange pants, but they don't seem to have acted." She had a sweet, slow voice like a child making up a story.

Without words, Percy picked her up and wound her round his neck in place of the indignant racoon. So she finished that day's journey, perched upon the black's shoulders, her long, slim legs dangling, a child's size in canvas shoes upon her sunburned feet.

Arthur and I tramped behind saying the right things and feeling superior. Perhaps all really excellent guides should make a point of giving out when the last difficulties have been surmounted. For nothing could give their charges a greater sense of their own value. Self-satisfied to the pitch of divinity, we ministered to the delicious and crumpled Jane. There was nothing we could not dominate—life, the habits of British Guiana, bush-blacks, ticks or reluctant outboard motors. Before we had got ourselves into too much of a muddle Jane fortunately recovered and took charge. So we returned to Georgetown, a most delightful place, full of people who were very kind to us and drinks which made us feel almost as entertaining as our hosts.

We enjoyed ourselves very much among sugar and molasses and sea-cows pretending to be mermaids and a glory of flowering trees in the pleasant, modern town, till the right 'plane arrived. Then we set off for Venezuela. But we had made a mistake. It was the wrong 'plane, and it got rid of us firmly in Trinidad.

At Port of Spain we spent an afternoon at Government House which for me is solely connected with Candle Trees. The hill-sides were burning yellow with them. They looked like a birthday cake. Then we discovered a small, German cargo-boat bound for La Guayra. The captain, an elderly man from Hamburg, let us have his spare cabin. It was on the bridge, very clean, with very hard bunks. For two or three days we steamed slowly back to South America. There was no space to move. We sat on the bridge and talked. It was terribly pathetic, I thought. For our host was a fine sailor and a decent old-fashioned German. His heart was full of his wife, for whom he was much afraid. He had left her in Hamburg, and he did not know what would happen to her. The best he could hope was that she would be left alone, but in a moment of confidence, he acknowledged that she might be a hostage for his allegiance to the new political regime. We drank beer with this very simple, kindly man in a cabin stuffed with reminiscences. Everything we sat on or leaned against

was embroidered. Sugar-sweet music came from the wireless. Family photographs covered the walls. There were crocheted mats, a large Bible, and some carved wooden models of cottages and ships. The Captain talked to us far into the night, of a Germany which no longer existed.

#### CHAPTER XLVI

*Venezuela and the Amazing President Gomez. Costa Rica. Guatemala. Mexican Surprises. After Fourteen Years I Come to a Conclusion. Of Many Ends—Here is One*

CARACAS, IN VENEZUELA, remains in my mind as the most delectable town, but I suspect this is because we stayed there with the Keelings. For often when I have excited intending travellers with the charms of Caracas, they have returned somewhat disappointed. "Nice enough," they say, "but I don't know why you were so enthusiastic." So it must have been the Keelings. Edward was British Minister. Magda is half Argentine, half Spanish, previously married to a Gaetani in Rome. The combination is unique. We had first met them in Finland, on one of Arthur's War Office journeys. Having the usual letter of introduction, we expected to be asked to tea. Instead we were bidden to supper at the local night-place. I always tease the Keelings, who, I think, never go to bed, by saying that the invitation was for "soon after one". Knowing nothing then of night life in Helsingfors, we went to sleep, I believe, and got up again. I still remember that party. It was such fun and—in spite of two marriages—I felt like a schoolgirl in her first ball dress beside the originality and studied perfection of Magda. Heaven had done much for her. Her amazing red-gold hair reached to her knees. But she had done the rest herself. For most women would not have known what to do with that hair—and the modern hat. Magda made a turban of it and allowed her small, delicate face to remain pale—and mysterious—underneath. At times she experimented with green eyelids or gold—but they did not assert or emphasize the unusual, because Magda always looked like one of those entrancing Madonnas, wise in the ways of men, who long to step from their high places upon a Byzantine altar. Next time we saw the Keelings it was in Brazil. Magda was ill—most picturesquely, in a bed which suggested the Doges. She looked as if she were going to a party. On the end of the couch, not unlike an azalea bed, sat Noel Coward. He had just been water-ski-ing in the harbour. I had known him intermittently for some years and admired his amiability as much as his talent. He was always amusing and delightful to meet. At one time we wrote, unwittingly, a book and a play both called *Sirocco*.

They were concerned with totally different subjects. Noel's was the hot wind of emotion. Mine was of the desert in Mauretania. I do not know which work killed the other. But book and play died ignominiously. Their decease was quick and final. But my *Sirocco* did rise from the grave in a few foreign languages, including—since the Eighth and First Armies' successes—Spanish.

I remember a growing party round Magda's bed in Rio, with a quantity of unbelievably beautiful women looking as if nothing but adoration had ever happened to them, and an argument with Noel Coward about 'Cavalcade'. I have always thought it a masterpiece, except for the last scene. Instead of a night-club pot-pourri representing the aftermath of the last war, I would have liked the revolving stage to show the new poor and the new workers hurrying—and blundering—about their new jobs. I remember Noel's answer to my criticism. It was perspicacious as well as clever, I thought. "You must sometimes give an audience what it expects——" While I was considering this, he added, "It won't stand for the unexpected all the time."

In Caracas, the Keelings had established the Legation in an old white Spanish house on a rough hill-side. It looked right over the town, quilted in flowering trees, to wilder hills beyond. In the garden, Arthur and I had a little house to ourselves, with a humming-bird and a hibiscus outside the parlour window. Under the Keelings' roof, parties had the enterprise of tropical creepers. They might begin with cocktails and the Corps Diplomatique at six or seven in the evening, but as nobody *would* leave and everybody who could think of an excuse *would* come, they went on through an impromptu dinner and were swept out by a seasoned staff before—or after—breakfast. Those parties were born and grew—they were never made. In the middle of one—and of the night—a Latin Minister decided that we must see the red light quarter of Caracas. "Nowhere is there such local colour," he assured us. We piled into his big car and went down through the dreaming town, hardly yet asleep. Its pale houses, white or delicately pink, were formal and ornate as wedding-cakes. They were surrounded by high walls. Within these, as we knew, were the loveliest courts leading one into another, with arches, fountains and flowers. Each generation of the feudal and Catholic families had a different part of the house. Wives did not go out without their husbands. Young women still had their duennas. It was a shuttered life, fragrant with old-fashioned dignity, but compressed like the Victorian figure by its whalebones. Away from these leisurely great houses we went, to streets where a solitary light burned in front of each door. On the top of each high flight of steps stood a woman in red. Inevitably she was olive-skinned and dark-haired. In the moonlight, she looked sombre and splendid in her curious close-fitting dress with its flounced train—all red. I could not believe these figures were

real. They were so still and so much alike. Behind them, through the open doors, the light showed a bed with frilled pillows, an image of the Madonna and a stoup of holy water. Sometimes a French doll, with an exquisitely evil face, sprawled upon the pillows.

One afternoon we went with the Keelings to a formal reception given by President Gomez for the Corps Diplomatique. He was an amazing old man—a Dictator in morals as well as in politics. He ruled with a rod of iron and a good deal of wisdom, but he owned most of the country and a large proportion of what it produced. He had made it, conquering opposition with guile—or rifles—putting his numerous illegitimate sons into positions of power and ruling like Napoleon through the ramifications of his family alliances. Whenever I asked to whom a well-cultivated farm or an enormous herd, a hotel or a pleasant country house belonged, the answer was always 'the President'. Yet Gomez did much for Venezuela. He gave it security. He abolished all oppression and all exploitation—except his own. He was a great man in his way—and a great patriot. But he belonged to earlier centuries, to the days of Van Horn or de Soto, when morals were a matter of latitude and ambitions approved by success. The official reception was unique. For the small, dark, wiry President in general's uniform sat on a dais with his *matresse en titre* beside him. She looked like a respectable Victorian housekeeper, her curves upholstered in black silk. Beside this incongruous pair were ranged the sons and daughters of their union. They were all illegitimate. The young women were well-dressed in bright evening silks. They looked like delicate dark anemones until the end of the reception. Then they offered well-muscled arms to their father and supported him to the door. Next day, it happened that I sat next to the Papal Nuncio at lunch. I had noticed him among other diplomats at the palace. "You do not mind bowing to Señora So-and-So?" I asked. "Madame," replied the clerical statesman, "on such occasions I do not see the Señora or her children. I see only Venezuela's need of the Church."

Slowly we wandered across Mexico Bay. It was the first holiday Arthur and I had spent together west of the Atlantic, and it was perhaps my happiest journey. For I wrote very little. Instead, I read the books of other people and enjoyed them immeasurably more than my own. Aldous Huxley's *Beyond the Mexique Bay* I carried as much in my pocket as possible.

While we were in this mood Curaçoa seemed to us like a town in toyland. The houses were all different colours, but with the same white trimmings. Palest pink, green and yellow, they looked like the best sugar candy and they peered at themselves with justifiable pleasure in canals reminiscent of their own delicious country. I remember one anomaly. For the two principal parts of the wonderfully clean, smart little town, the last word in prosperity and good sense, were connected by a bridge. In order that the better off should pay



for its upkeep and the poor be exempt, toll was levied on all wearers of shoes. This was an admirable idea, for in the tropics social distinctions are established by footwear. But Dutch thrift had spread to the pleasant brown islanders. One and all—upon reaching the bridge—took off their shoes, put them neatly on their heads and walked across barefoot. Thus, within the letter of the law, they evaded the toll.

We had great fun in Curaçoa. The Dutch Governor sent an A.D.C. to meet us. He ministered equitably to the entertainment of our bodies and minds. We were taken all over the vast, modern refinery which deals with the oil of Venezuela. We inspected the fleet of flat-bottomed tankers which bring it across from the wells up-country in Venezuela. These—with bauxite cargoes from Dutch Guiana—were the most valuable prey for German submarines in the Caribbean. And the only time I have heard the incomparable B.B.C. make a mistake of fact—in the course of its extremely hard and effective war-work—was when its announcer spoke of a U-boat having shelled 'the oil-field' on Curaçoa. There is none. It is on the mainland among the savage hills and forests beside the great, still, pewter-coloured waters of Venezuela.

After we had been shown all of concern to oil, we were motored to a moonlit dinner-party on a boat moored in a creek. The idea was that we should bathe in the still sea, between the huge flowering bushes robbed of their colour but heavily scented. But the food was too good. After 'reistafel', heaped in mystic confusion of which only the foundations are rice, I wanted nothing but unbending repose—upon as many cushions as possible.

When we left Curaçoa the hospitable Governor gave Arthur an enormous round flagon, in which liqueurs cunningly kept themselves to themselves in layers, green, white, orange and red. To me he presented bottles of scent, chosen by his pluperfect A.D.C., who must have had either a keen sense of humour or been a trifle unobservant. For His Excellency was imposing and dignified, but unable to refrain from a faint blush when he found himself pressing into the hands of a comparatively young and—let us hope—personable woman, in the presence of her husband, perfume flasks with the labels "My Sin" and "Scandal".

On board the coasting craft bound for Costa Rica, we were enormously popular—on account of Arthur's bottle. No doubt his invariable charm contributed to our success, but I cannot help feeling that it was largely due to those brilliantly striped liqueurs which were the basis of nightly parties.

In Costa Rica, we disembarked among oranges and bananas and the bustle of the American Fruit Company's loading. As quickly as possible we went up to the hill-country to stay on a coffee-farm with a delightful English family. We rode a great deal and learned, I hope, a

certain amount about the trees which were, I think, in bloom. I am not sure, for I have seen so much coffee, from Java to Peru. But when the flowers are out, it is a delicious sight—like hoar frost in a gentle dusk. We could not bear to lose our hosts till the last moment, so we persuaded them to come to the capital with us. There, in San Domenico, we went to a few official parties and drove out to the village of the witches, shunned after nightfall, because every woman in it was supposed to have the evil eye. We also gave Punch and Judy interviews to the friendliest pressmen. They kindly ignored the obvious promptings of the coffee-farmers who instructed us in outrageous whispers, "Say this". "Say that". So I hope agriculture benefited by our puppet speeches, duly recorded as first impressions of the country.

Before dawn—why must everything happen before dawn on aerodromes?—we left Costa Rica for Guatemala. This I think is one of the loveliest countries in the world. It has everything. Near the coast is lush jungle, out of which rise terrifying giant plinths, carved with beasts, gods and demons. There is a gay, delicious capital, Guatemala City, where we must have been official guests. For we were much cherished—and photographed at the oddest times, including meals and on the way to a bath. The hotel presented us with a selection of rooms. We could not have used them all, but our kindly hosts filled them with flowers and what I thought must be the first fruits of Eden. They were so brightly coloured and strangely shaped. The largest basket was in Arthur's room. I was rather jealous. But somebody said, "It is right. For a man has more appetite—except in love." Far into the hills of Guatemala we motored, to Chichicastenango, which is Eden and heaven combined.

It was the Day of the Cross. Thousands and thousands of Indians had come down from the hills. They were the smallest people I had seen. Some were no more than four feet high. Beside Arthur's imposing length of limb, they looked like toys. Their clothes were the gayest imaginable. Embroideries and stripes blazed in raw purples, reds and yellows. Into the market-place poured the little people, carrying their gods on their backs. These gods were made of wood or clay, fiercely coloured. Gourds and tropical fruits were scarcely less vivid. It was not till we had reached the middle of the square and were towering over the butterfly people—so grim and grave compared to their irresponsible garments—that I realized the crowds made no sound. I could *see* the Indians bargaining—or praying. I *saw* an argument, a knife raised, rose petals scattered in front of holy images. I watched men eat and drink, using their hands as implements or crockery. I strained my ears to catch the sound of an obvious—and pantomimic—discussion. But I heard nothing at all. I was afraid.

When I spoke to the driver of our car my voice ripped the silence as if it were scissors used on rough cloth. Yet I was relieved to hear it. For a moment I had wondered if I had been deprived of my normal

senses. "Indians do not talk," said the olive-brown, city-bred Guatemalan. "What should they say? It is sufficient if they talk with God."

The silent market proceeded. Without speech, hundreds of toy men and women concluded their bargains. It seemed to me that their steps made no sound. Their soft sandals in the sand had no more effect than blossoms falling on velvet. The babies did not cry. The hens did not cluck. Beads did not tinkle nor sun-baked jars clatter. The little people in their excess of clothes, with vivid blankets heaped over skirts and flaunting jackets, transmuted the things they touched. It was an extraordinary experience.

In the church there was sound. From the great door to the steps of the high altar the half-converted Indians had made a path of roses. High up on the earthen walls hung the pictures of martyrs, horribly—and ingeniously—tortured. The little Indians averted their eyes. They knelt on the mud floor, each household huddled together, and arranged families of candles in the path of flowers. There was one taper for each person, a huge fat one for the great-uncle who had died without telling where he had hidden his silver, a wisp of wax for the fifteenth baby, born last week and huddled in red cotton on its mother's back. Only the head of the family prayed, and as befitted his dignity, he talked on equal terms with God.

"Now listen, Lord," insisted a withered old man with one eye closed, "you didn't do anything about my horse which was lost, but the cow has calved and it is a female, so perhaps you were busy over that. Now you really must help us to find Uncle's silver. Think, Lord—all those pieces wasted!" Surreptitiously the old man took a stone from its hiding-place among his brilliant waistcoats. It was an image of the little old god familiar for generations. With a glance over his shoulder towards the priest—busy among candles and incense at the altar—he set the idol among the rose petals. Now he felt much more comfortable. And surely the new grand God—with such a beautiful church of His own—could not possibly be jealous of anything so small.

Outside the church, a tall, thin man stood among the heaped flower-heads. He looked even less real, in his plain black cloak, than the fantastic, wasp-striped Indians reaching to his elbows. "Are you not going in?" I asked, on an impulse, in Spanish. For a moment we stood together, while Arthur pushed some money into an offertory box. "I dare not," said the man. Our eyes met and I shivered. For I was talking to something mutilated. In wars of the spirit wounds may be inflicted which the flesh could never bear. I must have asked "Why?" The man replied, "It may be that I have committed the unforgivable sin." His eyes were shuttered. Behind their blank darkness, terror stirred. I do not think anybody could have asked what he meant. Certainly I had not at that moment the courage.

Arthur and I stayed in an inn, very comfortable and unlike anything but the stage-setting for a play about the Conquistadores and their Mayan princesses. We ate delicious and improbable meals in a red and black room—or was it red and gold?—with Mayan gods and kings sitting in a stiff row in the courtyard outside. I slept in a larger room hung with reed matting and I washed in a great earthen jar. Next day we rode to the top of the range in search of 'the oldest god'. It was a stone image of pre-Mayan origin, standing among pines. The Indians believed the place to be 'the end of the world'. A bridal party preceded us. That morning the pair had been married by a priest in the Chapel of the Black Virgin. They had not understood a word of the Spanish service. But they had delighted in the flicker of candles, the hot sweet scent of wax and flowers and the magic of holy water. "To-night," explained our Indian guide, "when the moon rises, they will be married again by the 'god who has always been'." "Who is he?" I asked. "He has no name. He has always stood there. That is enough." There was finality in the tone. How few of us, I reflected, can afford to worship one god. We divide our allegiance. We play for safety, pulled in diverse directions by opposing impulses.

At the foot of the mountains we passed two Indians plodding towards an aerodrome. They were not only talking audibly, but with some violence. "What is it all about?" I asked our guide. He questioned the small men, each with a life-sized wooden Saint on his back. "One say holy men must travel without paying in the thing which flies. Other say—so heavy must pay two fares. One think small gods better. Can carry on stomach—so." He showed a little image tucked into his sash. "Other say big gods more important like big storm, big mountain, big noise." He hesitated.

"What do you think?" I asked.

"I think highly respected big gods better stay at home. They more heavy than water-pots, and if they fall, they very, very angry." The allegory seems to me interesting. For twenty years, most of us left our 'highly respected gods' at home.

To Antigua we went of course—with 'Aldous Huxley' in our pockets. I read him while lunching in another unusual inn, its courts full of flowers and birds. Outside the cool, grey walls the city of ghosts and memories drowned in the heat. Lovely and deserted, its broken palaces, its churches rent by earthquake, its split and grass-grown streets lie at the feet of the great volcanoes—the 'spirits of water and of fire'—by whose violence they were wrecked. "I cannot understand how such a writer saw *no* more in Antigua," I said to Arthur, and thrust *Mexique Bay* across the delicious fruit curry. A German voice spoke in my ear. "He saw nothing. He was so short-sighted." The manager was speaking. He always wandered familiarly round the tables, waiting to take part in conversation until he found a topic which interested him. "It was very sad for a man whose mind

saw all—more than existed—to be deprived of eyesight," he added.

I do not think I have ever met Mr. Huxley. But because of those few words in *Antigua*, a lost city deeply moving in its loveliness and sorrow—with legend hung like a stage backcloth—I was delighted to read this year his interesting work *The Art of Seeing*.

From Guatemala we went to Yucatan, and lost our luggage on the way. It fell off or out of a toy train which took us to the coast. We were still under an official wing, so frenzied appeals to local authority sent a trolley up the line with a gang who searched every bush and swamp. Arthur's big suitcase was recovered from nesting among bamboos. It had burst, and prodigal insects were already making use of such manna from heaven. Most of his possessions were collected from primeval matter and returned to him just as we were getting into a 'plane for Honduras. At that time I was writing for some American paper, and for Michael Huxley's excellent *Geographical Magazine*, an account of the Pan-American air system and the countries it covered. So the 'plane graciously waited for my luggage to be retrieved. But it did not come. "It does not matter," said Arthur. "I am sure Mrs. Farquhar will lend you anything you want in Mexico City." I was sorry for Mrs. Farquhar. We had never met her. As the wife of the British Chargé d'Affaires, she had invited us to stay. I knew she was attractive. I had heard she was very well dressed. I wondered what she would feel when a disreputable stranger in stained green linen arrived upon her doorstep with nothing but a powder-puff . . . and no powder on that. For once I could not endure Arthur's optimism. It seemed to me brutal. Speechless, I got into the 'plane—when the pilot would wait no longer. It was calm as in a tea-cup. The air was clear. We moved as if on rubber tyres upon an invisible road. There were only two other passengers, Central Americans, father and son. The elder was sick. I have never seen anyone so persistently, so untidily and so unnecessarily sick. For the 'plane might have been standing still. We were well out over the sea. There was no wind. After we had done all we could for the wretched man's relief, Arthur appealed to the pilot, "He'll collapse if he goes on like this. Haven't you anything in your Red Cross kit?"

"With that sort, there's only one remedy," said the pilot. "If he's too much trouble, knock him out."

Unable to achieve such Olympian detachment, Arthur and I wrapped ourselves in macintoshes and gazed into the blue. But the awful sounds continued. Desperately I said to the son, "Couldn't you convince your father there is no movement at all?" Reproachfully the youth gazed at me. His eyes were enormous and full of sorrow. "Señora," he said reproachfully, "my father is not sick because of the air. He is homesick."

It grew bumpy as we approached Belisle. We made a difficult landing upon a very choppy sea. The small, old-fashioned 'plane bucked

like a young steer. We were off the main P.A. line. We were also very nearly *in* the sea. Very wet, we were dragged out and rowed to land. There we had an excellent lunch—hot lobsters with cream and spice, and a welter of chocolate as an afterthought. The Central Americans ate heartily. I feared the future. But the father evidently forgot his home as he flew further from it. He was also rather frightened as we swung up over Nicaraguan desert and mountain. All that flight—from Costa Rica to Yucatan and on again to Mexico City—was as enthralling as Walt Disney's primeval world. I cannot say that we saw dinosaurs and mastodons, but we looked down upon their country. It was raw and harsh, with a violence of light which made the shadows heavy as purple paint. Out of stark desert rose the great volcanoes. They were too perfectly shaped. Modern art must disapprove of them. They looked like nothing except what they were—huge, yellow cones with smoke smeared out of their craters. It was so still and the sky so clear and colourless that the smoke seemed to be alive. A passionate, sombre thing, it spread over the strident amber of the peaks and the lunar barrenness below.

The next thing I remember was the excitement about the south-bound 'plane. Presumably it was flying at a different level. We had the whole sky for the two of us, but pilot and navigator breathed a sigh of relief when the shining silver Douglas came out of a cloud to starboard. "I always get het up till she's past," said the wireless officer, mopping the back of his neck. I find it amusing to remember this—and our simultaneous feeling of being in the van of progress—in view of the thousand-bomber raids over Germany.

It was ice-cold at 20,000 feet over the snows of Central American ranges. It was oven-hot when we landed at Merida. The ground seemed to me to take deliberate pleasure in discomfiting me. It retreated and advanced in burning waves. The sand was so hot that it stabbed through my thin soles. Later I fell in love with Mexico because of its indomitable character and the way it takes its beauties for granted, as well as for the simplicity of the half-Indian peoples, the courage of its obstinate and always-being-murdered patriots and the gorgeous over-decoration of its churches and landscapes. But at the beginning, both Arthur and I found Mexico trying. It was passing through a period of artificially induced nationalism, so intensive and short-sighted that its new bureaucrats objected to all foreigners.

Under the impression that if a theft is big enough it becomes a matter of politics rather than morality, Mexico was determined to own and to manage the oil developed on borrowed capital. Foreigners must 'get out' of the fields. Their rights—in contracts or in script—were so much waste paper. It was a passing phase, but an unpleasant one.

Upon the aerodrome, growing hotter every minute, Arthur became involved in the most ludicrous arguments. So far South and Central America had sped us on our way with special visas. The new Mexican

officials, disliking the unusual, could not make up their minds as to the exact measure—or nature—of our importance. According to whether they had had lunch or not, their ideas turned to the extreme alternatives of a red carpet or prison. At one moment it seemed as if we should be arrested for having not too few, but too many, official passes. It must be confessed that the Government had changed since the delightful Mexican Minister in London had arranged our journey. With him, we were out of favour.

At last Arthur said he could not waste more time. He was so much larger than anyone else in sight that—when he stalked towards a vehicle—nobody stopped him. But the new officials, uncertain whether we were royalties or revolutionaries—disguised one as the other—retained our passports. From a safe distance they shrilled and gobbled orders to us not to leave the town. "Nonsense," said Arthur firmly. I scuttered after him, glad that—with all this fuss—I had no luggage to be investigated. It occurred to me that possibly my crumpled appearance was sufficiently out of keeping with the splendour of our 'laissez passers' to justify suspicion.

In the town, we ate an indifferent meal while the British Consul was summoned to extricate us from the ill intentions of the local officials.

Late that afternoon, we got our passports and an apology. We drove out through miles and miles of flat-topped forest to Chichinitza, where we stayed at a very attractive hotel divided into bungalows. It was the only modern building, so far as I remember, in the heart of a Mayan city. We used to climb to the top of some ruined palace or temple and watch the sun set over a sea of quiet dark green. Upon spreading branches, it seemed, floated the mighty flights of steps, the arches and the colonnades of a royal race, descended from the gods of earth and air. The bleached, white buildings looked like full-rigged ships upon an endless ocean. For the forest stretched, flat and calm to the horizon. What ghosts must haunt Chichinitza! In the moonlight we walked between the pillars of the great King's palace and imagined the splendour of a thousand-year-old court. Cruelty and superstition were forgotten. I remembered only the fertile imagination of the Maya craftsmen, their love of colour and the way they made gods out of birds and beasts.

In the day-time, I persistently washed my green frock, while wearing a shirt and trousers belonging to Arthur. In these, I walked about looking like the pea in the Princess's mattress. For me, those days were punctuated by Arthur turning up ends all over me.

I was glad to get back into my dress—and into the 'plane for Mexico City. Harold Farquhar, immaculate and aloof, met us on the aerodrome with my luggage. It had that moment arrived, by the resourceful Pan-American. How delighted I was to see it! For I had never really credited Arthur's prediction of an unknown hostess "delighted" to lend her latest imported Molyneux to a disreputable guest.

Mexico City went to my head like the fumes of a particularly successful, hot punch. Its architecture is as imaginative and overstressed as any hedonist could desire. The Mexicans we met had the dignity and charm of a very ancient race, with a spirit of adventure inherited from the Conquistadores. They were immensely hospitable. Audrey Farquhar, who became a great friend—possibly because I did *not* borrow her clothes—gave lovely parties in the old wandering thick-walled house acting, for the moment, as Legation. We went to other parties in great, dim, gorgeous rooms hung with brocades, glimmering with gold and sacred images. They were always a little like churches. They were restful and, oddly enough, secure, among the violent changes and chances apparently inseparable from Mexican evolution. A revolution of a sort had just ended—in the capital. In the country districts it continued gustily—like April gales. Lunching one day in a hospitable Mexican house, the ex-Minister beside me excused himself to answer a telephone call. When he returned it was to resume, with enthusiasm, a conversation about baroque art. "Any news of your farm?" queried our host. "Yes—that message was from my bailiff. There was some trouble this morning. A number of my peons were shot by these agitators who are going about. But they managed to kill the leader. He was one of the new government men." In perfect calm this announcement was assimilated. It seemed to me astounding. The ex-Minister explained, "The present government is against the landowners, so it sends agents to make trouble on the farms. There is generally some shooting, for our labourers have been with us for generations and they do not like interference. That is natural—yes?"

"Quite," I replied, and wondered if in time I should be able to dissociate myself completely from that odd British prejudice for justice. It sometimes hampers one's appreciation of other countries.

Harold Farquhar possessed a four-seater 'plane. In it he flew us somewhat recklessly about the skies, landing haphazard wherever we happened to find ourselves. On one occasion it was the Pacific instead of the Atlantic, but the error—in distance—was not very great. After all, Francis Drake from one tree in Darien saw both oceans at the same time. Long before men dreamed of the Panama Canal, Queen Elizabeth's admiral recorded the portentous possibility of one Power being able to hold the two seas.

I remember a morning in Mexico City when we took off very early from the excellent airfield. Mist shrouded the great peaks. We climbed between them through thick whiteness. Suddenly we came out into a clarity thin and dazzling. On each side of us, so near that it seemed we could touch at least one of them, were the mighty summits of Popocatepetl and Iztaciawatl. My heart missed a beat. It was so impossibly lovely. Our small 'plane was a gnat—no more. Below us the tufted white clouds shut out the earth. We were alone and free



of the sky—sharing it with those two mighty white peaks, their snows frozen stiff and still since the ice age. That is one of the moments I shall remember all my life.

Mexico provided me with others. It is incomparable in its contrasts—dark pine forests and tawny leonine deserts, Mayan temples prodigious as the ideas of midnight, and the plains of Puebla breaking into highly coloured domes like soap-bubbles. There are three hundred of these churches, each more fanciful than the last. The little Indians, devoutly Catholic although extremist Governments had robbed them of their priests, conducted their own services which were slipping gradually back into pantheism. We heard a woman read the harvest ritual in a slim white church, its arches tangled with strangely colourful gods. I thought Pan would have felt at home. In another, we saw devout peons repainting the figures of beasts, devils, saints and angels—all very much alike—which in high relief decorated the walls. They suggested a human jungle. A half-Indian who could speak Spanish explained that he and his friends saved their wages and went without food to buy the brightest paints. For they thought the Madonna, whom they loved, would enjoy a cheerful, gay church.

It would be nice too, for her Baby. The Christ-child need not be saddened by dull, decaying walls—even if there was no priest to help His Mother look after Him. The need of these simple people for their priests would have been heart-breaking, had they not been so sure that their God and His Lady Mother would not mind ‘putting up’ with such service as they—the Indians—could give. Mexico remains for me a country of loveliness, faith and illusions. I long to return to see if it is all as delicately enchanting as I remember. But if you have—for a moment—seen the ‘most beautiful’ thing, you must never go back to make sure. You cannot continuously recognize the same perfection. If this were possible we should have no need of a heaven.

That was the last of my heedless journeys. For me it represented the end of a period. Subsequently, life became more serious. By 1935, I had seen all the world which is involved in to-day’s wars. Indeed, I had seen to-day in the making. Some of the signs I had recognized, but certainly not all. For fifteen years I had travelled, as I have recorded, in love with the sun and with the beauty of the earth. Friends I had made, from China wherein I journeyed as a girl, thinking of nothing but adventure, to the furthest ends of the Americas, across Africa and Arabia, to Russia or the roof of the world in Central Asia. I had also acquired some enemies. For I am persistently tactless. I tell too much of what I see. I say too much of what I think.

Alone, upon horse, mule or camel, in every conceivable conveyance from raft to armoured car, or with diverse sudden friends whom I liked or loved and left comet-wise, I had wandered off the edge of the map.

I had enjoyed myself very much. I had often been disappointed and sometimes sad because I could not convince the officials who mattered of international difficulty or disaster still in the cocoon. But, for all my love of humanity, whatever its speech, creed or colour, with all my interest in the peoples and individuals who were fantastically good to me in six continents, I had been—primarily—a gypsy. I had thought little of possessions. The big house in London was a shell out of which, like a wandering crab, I came whenever adventure tempted. The sun was my invariable companion. As soon as winter threatened—in England—off I went to be warm and free, with no clock or calendar, no engagements or responsibilities. With a solitary suitcase, I travelled, and no thought of my appearance. Time ceased to exist. I was content.

So far as my own life was concerned, I looked neither backwards nor forwards. There was enough to be seen and done—on occasions felt—in the present. But by 1935 the future was becoming emphatic. It could no longer be described as seen 'in a glass darkly'. It was obvious and tragic, although perhaps not yet inevitable. That it may have become towards the end of the year when Mussolini invaded Abyssinia.

Nobody with any sense could avoid the feeling of an 'appointment with destiny'. Arthur and I looked beyond this. For us—after that last irresponsible journey with convicts, beasts and gods, from the Guianas to Mexico—life became divided into two definite parts. There would, in all probability, be war. In any case, there would have to be some universal readjustment, organic in its dimensions. For civilization was literally in a crucible. Bolshevism suggested one precipitate, National Socialism another, commonplace Capitalism a third. Between these, there were other states and conditions of thought more or less fluid.

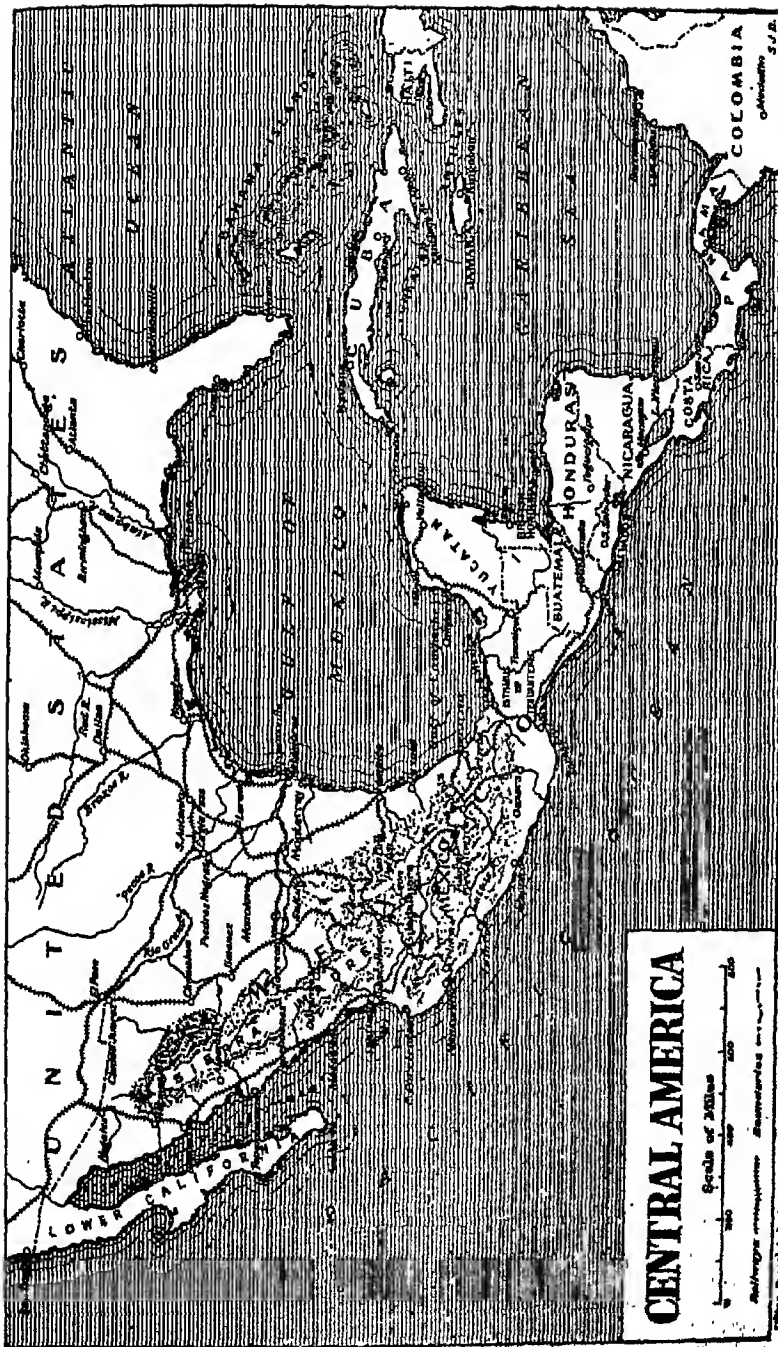
It was upon our return to England from the ferment of Mexico and the 'oil question' that we realized we were nearing the end of a historical period.

I remember Sir Samuel Hoare, wise, sensible and prophetic on the subject of Naboth's Vineyards in the Mediterranean, while we were all staying at West Dean with the Sturdees. There was no doubt in his mind of revolution pending. In the struggle which began to seem inevitable Arthur and I might, we hoped, be able to play some insignificant parts. But when it came to an end, when England had no more need of us in any capacity, I was determined we would live in the sun. So, after 1935, my travels were of a different kind. At the back of my head was always the idea—is this the country where I would like to live? Whenever I found myself with sea and enormous space, with the sun transmuting shape and bulk into a wizardry of colour, I built myself imaginary houses. In fact, I was hunting for my own future, as well as for a solution of world politics. The two were never

confused. But, in search of the future, personal and public, I travelled in a different fashion. There were in the years to come lots of adventures, grave and gay. There were absurd happenings and some sentimental ones. But in 1935 I ceased to be a gypsy in love with the sun. For, behind all the entertainment and interest of life, I was conscious, like many others, of 'appointment with destiny'.

#### END OF FIRST BOOK

The Second Book, *Appointment with Destiny* 1935-1944,  
is in preparation



# INDEX

Abadan, 215  
 Abdul Krim, 95, 101  
   captures el Raisuli, 101  
 Abdullah, guide on 1920 journey to Kufra,  
   43, 44, 49  
 Abdullah, Emir Ibn Hussein, 63, 83  
   on European women, 85  
   Rosita Forbes and, 83ff.  
   visit to London, 84-5  
 Abyssinia, 110ff., 198-9  
   funeral banquet in, 112  
   Haile Selassie on, 115  
   history and conditions, 114, 116  
 Addis Ababa, 112  
 Africa, 14-15  
   French Foreign Legion posts in, 145ff.  
 Agha, Osman, 56  
 Ahmed ben Mohammed el Raisuni. *See*  
   Raisuli, el  
 Ahmed Bey Hassanein, 37, 38, 69  
   accident on journey, 51-2  
   in England, 38  
   journey to Kufra, 37ff.  
   journey with Rosita Forbes to North  
     Africa, 40ff.  
   plans to murder, 43, 49  
   spiritual experiences in desert, 45-8  
 Ahmed Bey Tahiat, 23-4, 27, 28, 30-1,  
   33-4, 35  
 Ain Herod, Jewish communal colony at,  
   209ff.  
 Alba, Duke of, 95, 239  
 Albania, 185ff., 191ff., 197  
   blood feuds in, 192  
   Italy and, 185-6, 197  
 Alexander, King of Yugo-Slavia, 182, 183-5,  
   193ff.  
   co-operation with King Boris of Bulgaria,  
     172-3  
   on kingship, 195  
   on unity, 194, 196-7  
 Alfonso, King of Spain, 96, 243  
   personality, 96  
 Ali ibn Hussein, Sherif, 85, 86ff.  
   Dora Philby and, 88  
   Rosita Forbes and, 85-6, 88-9  
 Allen, David, 189  
 Allenby, Lord, 53  
 Alvarez, Father, on rock churches of Lali-  
   bela, 122  
 Andes, the, 266-7, 271, 289, 290  
 Angora, 201-3  
 Annunzio, Gabriele d', 14, 39  
 Arabia  
   attitude towards Great Britain, 42, 99

Arabia—*continued*  
   King Feisal and, 40  
   political position in 1920, 18-19, 35  
   Rosita Forbes and, 16, 29, 35-6, 42, 50,  
     69, 99-100, 102, 103, 212  
   Southern, 86  
   Sultan el Atrash on, 206, 207  
   unity, 23, 29, 40, 207, 212  
   Western, 76ff.  
 Aracangua, 251-3  
 Araçatuba, 250  
 Aramayos, Carlos and Renée, 271  
 Argentina, 256ff.  
   Indians, 260ff.  
   the Chaco, 261  
 Arif, Colonel, 55-6  
 Ascot races, 92-3  
 Asir, 82  
 Asir, Idrisi Emir of, 76  
   meeting with Rosita Forbes, 76, 77  
 Asmi Bey, 23  
 Astrid, Queen of Belgium, 143, 144  
 Atatürk, Mustapha Kemal, 55-6, 177, 203  
   Rosita Forbes and, 55-6, 203  
 Atlas mountains, 95ff., 145-6  
 Atrash, Sultan el, 204, 205-6  
   on Arabia, 206, 207  
   on France, 206-7  
 Axum, 111, 128-9  
 Baghdad, 212-13  
 Bahia, 246  
 Bakri, Mohamed el, 314  
 Baldwin, Stanley, on Europe's political  
   state, 91  
 Balfour, Lord, 13  
 Balkans, the, 155ff., 164ff., 178ff.  
   federation discussed, 164ff., 182  
   peasantries, 165  
   populations exchanged, 179-80  
   unity, King Alexander of Yugo-Slavia on,  
     196-7. *See also* each country by name  
 Banatz, Mr., 173  
 Baruch, Mr., 323-4  
 Beardsley, Grenville, 332-3  
 Belacho, Atto, head 'nagadi', 117, 118,  
   119, 121, 126  
 Belgium, 143-4  
 Bérnolt, Père, 346, 347, 351-2, 353  
 Bernard, convict cook in French Guiana,  
   348  
 Bessarabia, 162-4  
 Bethlen, Count, 160  
 Blumenfeld, Ralph, poem on Rosita Forbes's  
   London home, 200-1

Bolivia, 270ff.  
     Cholo women, 271-2  
     Indians, 273  
 Bonifaz, Nepali, 283-4  
 Bonneau, Marie Edith de, 314  
     on Kufra, 314-15  
 Borah, Senator, 319  
 Boris, King of Bulgaria, 135, 171ff.  
     Alexander of Yugo-Slavia and, 172-3, 195  
     foreign policy, 173  
     motoring, 172  
     personality, 172  
     visits to England, 174  
 Brazil, 248ff.  
     forests, 248ff.  
 Bucharest, 164  
 Budapest, 156, 157  
 Buenos Aires, 256ff.  
 Bulgaria, 169ff.  
     peasants of, 170-1  
 Bullett, William, 325  
 Butler, Sir Montagu, 242  
 Butterworth, Thornton, biography of el  
     Raisuli wanted by, 93, 95  
 Buxton, Lionel, 239  
  
 Caracas, 359-61  
 Carisbrooke, Lady, 243  
 Carl, ex-Emperor of Hungary, 158-9  
 Carpincho (animal), 255-6  
 Castro, Maria de, 282  
 Cayenne, 342ff.  
 Celebrity, 92-3  
 Cerra, Sanchez, 283  
 Chambrun, Comte de, 201-2  
 Chicago, 325ff.  
     gangsterism, 327ff.  
 Chichinitza, 368  
 Chile, 267ff.  
     German settlers, 267-9  
     political position, 269-70  
 Chocha, the, 121  
 Ciano, Countess Edda, 241, 242  
 Clemenceau, Georges, 13  
 Clerk, Sir George, 176, 200, 239  
 Clive, Sir Robert and Lady, 234  
 Cooper, Lady Diana, 106, 107  
 Cornwallis, Sir Kinahan, 16, 37, 42, 58  
 Costa Rica, 362-3  
 Cousse, Colonel, 19, 25-6  
 Coward, Noel, 257, 359-60  
     ' Cavalcade ', 360  
 Crane, Charles, 107  
 Croats, the, 182-3  
 Crofton, Adèle, 136, 150-1  
 Crofton, Sir Morgan, 136  
 Curaçoa, 361-2  
 Cyrenaica, 40ff.  
 Czecho-Slovakia, 337  
  
 D'Abnorn, Lord, 244-5  
 Daily Herald, poem on Rosita Forbes's  
     London home, 152-3

Daily Telegraph chronicles Rosita Forbes's  
     journeys, 70, 155, 201  
 Dakar, 341  
 Damascus, 23ff., 32  
 Dilbh, Jewish communal colony at, 209ff.  
 Dizful, 216  
 Dohna, Rilu zu, 142, 188  
 Douglas, Lew, 318  
 Dufferin, Lady, 241  
 Durdap (Zeitun), 229  
  
 Earhart, Amelia, 323  
 Ecuador, 283ff.  
 Egypt, 16, 18, 19  
 Einsiedel, Graf von, 339-40  
 Elizabeth, Queen of Greece, 168  
 Ena, Queen of Spain, 243, 244  
 Enver Pasha, 101  
 Eritrea, 16, 130, 131, 198  
 Espionnage anglais, Les dessous de l', 34  
 Europe  
     British post-war policy, 186  
     conditions between 1921 and 1939 in,  
         90ff., 155ff., 337ff.  
     Rosita Forbes on post-war state of, 143,  
         144-5, 188ff.  
  
 Faringdon, Lord, 244  
 Farquhar, Audrey, 366, 369  
 Farquhar, Harold, 368, 369  
 Feisal, King of Iraq, 19, 23, 25ff., 38-40,  
     57, 58, 212-14  
     Arab independence and, 40  
     at Lake Como, 38-40  
     friendship with Rosita Forbes, 25ff., 40,  
         56, 212-14  
     in London, 214  
     King of Iraq, 56, 58  
     letter to Sayed Mohamed Idris, 39, 40,  
         42  
     on his ancestry, 207-8  
     on Syria, 25, 26  
     personality, 213-14  
     Sir Kinahan Cornwallis and, 58  
 Fields, the Henry, 325  
 Finland, 301-3, 359  
 Flanagan, Colonel, 335  
 Forbes, Ronald, 12, 61  
 Forbes, Rosita, 5ff., 36, 48, 54, 89, 132,  
     253, 334, 354, 361, 370ff.  
     accident to foot in Bengazi, 42-3  
     adventures with gangster life in Chicago,  
         327ff.  
     Ahmed Bey Hassanein travels with,  
         37ff., 40ff.  
     Ahmed Bey Hassanein's vision concern-  
         ing, 48  
     Ahmed Bey Tahisti travels with, 23-4,  
         27, 28, 30-1, 33-4, 35  
     Ali ibn Hussein and, 85-6, 88-9  
     among Foreign Legion posts in Africa,  
         145ff.  
     ancestry, 10, 282

Forbes, Rosita—*continued*

and Arabian unity, 16, 29, 35-6, 50, 69,  
99-100, 102, 103, 212  
and Chinese art, 152  
and husband, 60-1, 62, 65ff, 71, 131,  
254. *See also* McGrath, Colonel  
Arthur  
and the Balkans, 155ff., 164ff., 178ff.  
at Aracangua 'fazenda', 251-3  
at Ascot, 92-3  
at Bedouin encampment, 80-1  
at Bengazi, 41  
at Dizful, 216  
at Iguasu, 260  
at Jeizan, 75-6  
at Lalibela, 122-3  
at La Mortola, 134-5  
at Montevideo, 254ff., 289  
at Nagodeh, 237-8  
at Qum, 216-17  
at Sinamari, 351-2  
at Tehran, 219-20, 234  
attempted crossing of Rub al Khali, 109-  
110  
attitude towards early rising, 354  
attitude towards religion, 64  
audience with Empress Zaiditu of Abyssinia, 111-12  
audience with King George V and Queen Mary, 60  
books, 14, 16, 36, 44, 132, 155, 240,  
289, 341  
British outlook contrasted with American  
by, 106  
British Government's attitude towards  
journeys, 73  
career and personality of brother, 58-9  
caught in effects of volcanic eruption,  
290  
Channel crossing to France, 13  
childhood, 11, 304-5  
comments on United States, 103, 104,  
105, 108  
*Conflict*, 201  
crosses Andes, 266-7  
crosses Shurgaz depression, Persia, 229  
*Daily Herald's* poem on London home,  
152-3  
*Daily Telegraph* and, 70, 155, 201  
desert journeys, 37ff., 46, 50ff., 68,  
220ff., 227ff., 233-4. *See also* each  
journey by name  
earthquake damage in Western Persia  
described, 236  
*Eight Republics in Search of a Future*,  
244-5  
el Raisuli and, 93, 95ff.  
el Raisuli's writing in honour of, 101  
engagement to Colonel McGrath, 62  
entertained by Admiral Horthy, 157,  
158ff.  
entertained by King Zog, 186-7  
fascination of desert, 28, 41, 233-4

Torbes, Rosita—*continued*

father, 10, 18, 20, 54, 59  
film of travels, 132  
flights in Pan-American airways, 342,  
366-7, 368  
friends, 132ff.  
friendship with Colonel Forth, 53-4  
friendship with Hugh Gundley, 254-5,  
256, 260, 289-90, 337  
friendship with King Feisul, 255ff., 40,  
56, 212-14  
friendship with King George of the  
Hellenes, 169  
friendship with Lady Hanbury, 132,  
135-6, 137  
geographical gold medals, 66  
*Golden Vagabond, The*, 355  
Great Cumberland Place home, 150ff.,  
199-201  
Haile Selassie entertains, 115  
Harold Jones and, 110ff., 131-2  
hold-up in Abyssinia, 117-19  
honeymoon, 65-6  
horsemanship, 51-2, 61  
ideas, 71, 234, 254, 334, 371  
in Aden, 110  
in Adowa, 130  
in Albania, 185ff., 191ff.  
in Anatolia, 55  
in Angora, 201-3  
in Araçatuba, 250  
in Argentina, 256ff., 289, 335  
in Antigua, 365-6  
in Atlas Mountains, 95ff., 145-6  
in Australia, 61, 62  
in Axum, 128-9  
in Baghdad, 212-13  
in Belgium, 143-4  
in Berlin, 304ff., 337ff.  
in Bessarabia, 162-3  
in Bolivia, 270ff.  
in Bou Denib, 148  
in Brazil, 248ff., 359, 360  
in British Guiana, 354ff.  
in Bucharest, 164  
in Budapest, 156, 157  
in Buenos Aires, 256ff., 335  
in Bulgaria, 169ff.  
in Cairo, 53, 56-7  
in Caracas, 359ff.  
in Carasco, 337  
in Cayenne, 342ff.  
in Chicago, 325ff.  
in Chile, 267ff.  
in Chocha, 121  
in Costa Rica, 362-3  
in Curaçoa, 361-2  
in Cyrenaica, 40ff.  
in Czecho-Slovakia, 337  
in Dakar, 341  
in Damascus, 231ff., 32  
in Ecuador, 283ff.  
in Egypt, 16, 18, 19

Forbes, Rosita—*continued*

- in England, 132ff., 150ff., 199-201, 239-240, 303, 313
- in Eritrea, 16, 130, 131
- in Finland, 301-3, 359
- in France, 136-8
- in French Guiana, 342ff.
- in Germany, 140-7, 188-9, 304ff., 337ff.
- in Gondar, 128
- in Greece, 169, 179-80
- in Guatemala, 363ff.
- in Hamada, 146-8
- in Hamideya, 81-2
- in Hodeidah, 82-3
- in Holland, 139-40
- in Hungary, 141-2, 155ff.
- in Iraq, 212ff.
- in Ireland, 240-1
- in Isfahan, 221
- in Italy, 38ff., 153-4
- in Jebel Druse, 204, 206-7
- in Jedda, 63
- in Jerusalem, 21-2
- in Kufra, 48-9, 314-15
- in Kurdistan, 236-7
- in Leningrad, 292ff.
- in Lima, 282
- in London, 58-60, 67-8
- in Macedonia, 178ff.
- in Marakesh, 145
- in Mareb, 130
- in Mexico, 367ff.
- in Mexico City, 369
- in Middle East, 53ff., 201ff. *See also* each country by name
- in Milan, 39
- in Monastir, 193ff.
- in Morocco, 96ff., 145ff.
- in Moscow, 291, 295, 301
- in North Africa, 14-15
- in Norway, 138-9
- in Palestine, 20-2, 207ff.
- in Paris, 13-14, 58, 66
- in Patagonia, 265
- in Persia, 109-10, 214ff., 236, 240
- in Peru, 282ff.
- in Poland, 141
- in Portugal, 244
- in Rio de Janeiro, 245, 248
- in Roumania, 162ff.
- in Russia, 201ff.
- in Sabya, 76
- in Shiraz, 222, 224
- in Sofia, 174-5
- in South America, 244ff., 335-6, 341-2
- in Southern Arabia, 86
- in Spain, 243-4
- in Stamboul, 176, 177
- in Sucre, 274-5
- in Sudan, 16
- in Switzerland, 137
- in Syria, 19, 23ff., 31ff., 203-4
- in Taj, 49-50

Forbes, Rosita—*continued*

- in Tirana, 186-8
- in Trans-Jordan, 83ff.
- in Transylvania, 160-1
- in Turkey, 176ff., 201ff.
- in United States, 102ff., 109, 315ff., 333-334
- in Uruguay, 254ff., 289-90, 337, 342
- in Venezuela, 359ff.
- in Venice, 153-4
- in Washington, 315ff.
- in Western Arabia, 72ff.
- in the Yemen, 72, 79ff.
- in Yucatan, 366
- in Yugo-Slavia, 180ff.
- in Xauen, 97
- incident in Midi, 77-8
- incident in Syrian village, 30-1
- international views, 144-5
- James Larue and, 332-3
- journey from Lalibela to Gondar, 123ff.
- journey in German cargo-boat to South America, 358-9
- journey in *Khadra*, 73-5
- journey in Sahara, 44ff.
- journey round the world, 14
- journey to and from Kufra, 37ff., 50ff., 59-60, 68-9
- journey to and stay in Petra, 85, 86, 87-9
- journey to Egypt, 49ff.
- journey to North Africa, 40ff.
- journey to Palmyra, 27
- journey to Trans-Jordan, 204-5
- journey up Guayas River, 284-5
- journey with Harold Jones in and from Abyssinia, 120ff., 131-2
- Kemal Atatürk and, 55-6, 203
- King Alexander of Yugo-Slavia enters, 183-5, 193ff.
- lectures, 102, 109, 315
- life, 132, 242, 298-9, 370-1
- London home, 150ff., 199-201
- Lord Edward Gleichen, and, 69
- loss of fortune, 174ff.
- Lutyens and, 150ff.
- marriages, 12, 13, 62, 65ff.
- married life, 70-1
- meeting with Idrisi Emir of Asir, 76, 77
- meeting with King Boris of Bulgaria, 171-2
- meeting with Sayed Mohamed Idris, 41
- meeting with Sir Ronald Storrs, 64
- meetings with Adolf Hitler, 305ff.
- meetings with Emir Abdullah, 83ff.
- meetings with Queen Mary, 60, 92
- meetings with Signor Mussolini, 197-9
- motor-car accident, 136-7
- on beauty, 370
- on 'celebrity', 92-3
- on Colonel T. E. Lawrence, 57-8
- on England, 108
- on King Alfonso, 96
- on loneliness of royalty, 139



Forbes, Rosita—continued

- on talk, 254
- on three happy people, 107
- on youth of 10-day, 71-2
- parents, 10ff., 59
- partial pilgrimage to Mecca, 62-4
- personality, 10-11, 61, 69-70, 71, 89, 93, 104, 191, 240, 254
- plans to murder, 43, 49
- Position of the Arabs in Art and Literature, The*, 108
- President Roosevelt and, 56, 320ff.
- public speech in Syria, 34-5
- publicity and, 54-5, 65, 102-3, 152ff., 256-7, 289
- Queen Marie of Roumania entertains, 166
- Queen Marie of Yugo-Slavia entertains, 183-5
- quoted in New York newspapers, 102-103
- Quest*, 103
- received by Marco Joni, 192-3
- relations with General Lawson, 70
- ride across the Sierra, 275ff.
- Russia and, 100, 299-300
- St. John Philby and, 83ff.
- Secret of the Sahara, The*, 44
- Sirocco*, 359-60
- spiritual protection during travels, 48
- state of post-war Europe discussed, 143, 144-5, 188ff.
- supposed secret service agent, 34
- The Times* and, 239
- Thornton Butterworth and, 93, 95
- travels, 10, 12, 14, 17-18, 201, 233-4, 239, 371-2
- travels with husband in Europe, 89ff., 138ff., 155ff., 337
- Unconducted Wanderers*, 16
- visit to Kaietur Falls, 355ff.
- with Ruwalla tribe, 27ff.
- Women Called Wild*, 341
- writing and articles of, 70, 91-2, 104-5, 106, 107, 155, 335, 341, 366
- Ford, Henry, 324-5
- Forth, Colonel, 53-4
- France, 136-8
  - Germany and, 304
  - outlook in, 138
  - Syria, French mandate and, 19, 23ff., 31ff., 203-4
- Franco, General, 93
- French, the, 13, 67, 133
- Fürstenburg, Max and Gloria, 341
- Gayner, Mr., 340
- George V, King, Rosita Forbes audience with, 60
- George, King of the Hellenes, 166, 168, 169, 200
- personality, 169
- Georgetown, 358

- Germany, 161, 188, 304ff., 337ff.
  - post-war conditions in, 140-1, 161, 188-9, 304ff., 337ff.
  - purge of June 30, 1934, 338-9
- Ghyka, Eileen, 165-6
- Ghyka, Matila, 165-6
- Giovanna, Queen of Bulgaria, 172
- Gleichen, Lord Edward, 69
- Goebbels, Dr. Paul, 338
- Goering, Hermann, 338
- Gomez, President, 361
- Gondar, 128, 129
  - journey to, 123ff.
- Gorgis, Gabra, cook on 1926 Abyssinian journey, 116, 118, 120, 124, 126, 127, 129
- Gouraud, General, 19, 66-7, 143
- Graham, Sir George, 244
- Graves, Allen, 188, 305, 310
- Great Britain
  - outlook contrasted with American, 106
  - post-war (1914-18) state, 108, 313-14
- Greece, 169, 173, 179-80
- Grindley, Hugh, 254-5, 256, 260, 289-90, 337
- Guarimpo, 253
- Guatemala, 363ff.
  - Indians, 363-4
- Guayas, River, 285-6
- Guiana, British, 354ff.
- Guiana, French, 342ff.
  - convicts at, 342ff.
- Guinnesses, the, 200
- Haakon, King, 139
- Hadad Pasha, 63
- Hadvany, Lili, 142
- Haile Selassie, Emperor of Abyssinia, 111, 114-15
  - personality, 115
- Halideh Hanoum Edib, 36, 55, 107
- Hamada, 146-8
- Hanbury, Lady, 132, 135-6, 137
  - Rosita Forbes on, 132
- Hanfstängel, Herr, 305-6
- Harar, 110-11
- Harrington, Bill, 241
- Harrington, Lady, 241, 242
- Hashim Pasha, 24-5, 32-3
  - on Syria, 33
- Hassen, interpreter on Abyssinian journey, 116, 118, 119-20, 121-2, 127
- Helen, Queen of Roumania, 168
  - on kingship, 168
- Higgs, Captain, 72-3
- Hinks, Arthur, 60, 61, 70
- Hitchcock, Mrs., 190
- Hitler, Adolf, 199, 202, 304ff., 338-9
  - Bulgaria and, 173
  - England and, 311
  - ideas in 1933, 305ff.
  - in 1934, 338
  - meetings with Rosita Forbes, 305ff.

Hitler, Adolf—*continued*  
*Mein Kampf*, 309, 310  
 mother, 309  
 on National Socialism, 307-9  
 on oil of Central Asia, 215  
 personality, 306, 309-10, 311, 312, 313  
 phobias, 310  
 Roehm and, 338-9  
 Hodeidah, 82-3  
 Hodeidah, Qadi of, 83  
 Hogarth, Dr. D. G., 108  
*Penetration of Arabia, The*, 60  
 Holland, 139-40  
 Horstman, Friedrich, 188  
   on Germany's position in Europe in  
   1928, 188  
 Horthy, Admiral, 157ff.  
   on regency, 158-9  
   personality, 157-8, 159  
 Horthy, Madame, 158, 159-60  
 Hotin, 163  
 Hougronje, Dr. Snouck, 140  
 Howard, Joyce Fitzalan, 134  
 Hungary, 141-2, 155ff.  
   conditions after 1914-18 war, 156ff.  
   Jewish nationals, 157  
 Hussein, King of the Hedjaz, 39  
 Hussein Khan, Sergeant-Major, 238  
 Huxley, Aldous, 361, 365-6  
  
 Iguazu, 260  
 Inonü, General I., 177  
 Internationalism, 144-5, 203  
 Iraq, 212ff.  
 Ireland, 240-1  
 Isabella, Queen of Spain, 93  
 Isfahan, 221  
 Italy, 39, 40-1  
   Fascism in, 154  
   public attitude towards House of Savoy,  
   135  
 Italy, Crown Princess of, 135  
  
 Jacks, Tommy and Virginia, 219-20  
 Jaghabub, 51  
   'Jane', driver in British Guiana, 355ff.  
 Jebel Druze, 204  
   Druzes, religion of, 204  
   France and, 204, 206-7  
 Jedda, 63  
 Jerusalem, 21-2, 212  
 Jones, Harold, 109  
   journey in Abyssinia, 110ff., 117-19  
   return journey, 131-2  
 Joni, Marco, 185, 192, 193  
 Jusuf, 43, 44, 46, 50, 51  
 Jusuf, 'wakil' of the Idrisi Emir of Asir,  
   77, 80ff.  
  
 Kaletur Falls, the, 355-7  
 Kar, Herr von, 340  
 Kat, 79-80

Katt, Lieutenant, 331, 333  
 Keeling, Edward and Magda, 359-60  
 Kennard, Lady, 60  
 Kerman, 228-9  
*Khadra*, Arabian voyage of the, 73-5  
 Kings and kingship  
   King Alexander of Yugo-Slavia on, 195  
   Madame Horthy on, 159  
   Queen Helen of Roumania on, 168  
   Queen Marie of Roumania on, 168  
 Kufra, 15, 48, 49, 314-15  
 Kun, Bela, 157  
 Kuidistan, 236-7  
  
 Lalibela, 111, 122-3  
   rock churches, 122-3  
 Lalibela, King, 122  
 Lambert, General, 20  
 La Mortola, 134-5  
 Lamy, Mademoiselle Antoinette, 343ff.  
 Lamy, Mademoiselle Louise, 345ff.  
 Lamys, the, 344ff.  
 La Paz, 271-2  
 Larue, James, 332-3  
 Lawrence, Colonel T. E., 23, 57-8, 63  
   Rosita Forbes on personality of, 57-8  
 Lawson, General F., 70  
 Lebanon, 19. *See also* Syria  
 Leningrad, 292ff.  
 Leopold III, King of Belgium, 143-4  
   Belgian opinion on second marriage, 144  
   on Queen Astrid, 144  
 Liappchev, Mr., 177-8  
 Lima, 282  
 Lindbergh, Colonel, 323  
 Lindleys, the, 244  
 Lindsey, Lady, 320  
 Llamas, 272  
 Lutyens, Robert, 150  
   designer of Colonel and Mrs. McGrath's  
   London home, 150ff.  
 Lyautey, Marshal, 14  
  
 McCallum, Duncan, 19  
 McCarl, John Raymond, 325  
 MacDonald, Ramsay, 189  
 Macedonia, 178-80, 181, 182  
 McGrath, Colonel Arthur (husband of  
   Rosita Forbes), 60-1, 65ff., 132, 253,  
   254, 255, 270-1, 273, 274, 283, 354ff.,  
   361, 366  
   among French Legion posts in Africa,  
   145ff.  
   career at War Office, 90  
   engagement, 62  
   flights on Pan-American airways service,  
   366ff.  
   friends, 132ff.  
   in British Guiana, 354ff.  
   in Hungary, 155  
   in United States, 190-1  
   international views, 144

McGiath, Colonel Arthur—*continued*  
 loss of fortune, 174ff  
 marriage, 65ff  
 motor-car accident, 136-7  
 personality, 65, 70-1  
 travels, 243ff  
 travels in Europe, 89ff, 138ff, 243ff  
 visit to Kaletur Falls, 355ff

Maclean, Sir Harry, 94

MacMichael, Sir H., 16

Magyar, the, 156, 157

Makonnen, Peterari, 117-19

Malacida, Peter, 153

Mannerheim, Field Marshal, 302-3  
 on Russo-Finnish relations, 302  
 personality, 303

Marakesh, 145

Marie, Queen of Roumania, 165, 166ff.  
 on kings and kingship, 168

Marie, Queen of Yugo-Slavia, 183-4

Marie José, Princess *See* Italy, Crown Princess of

Mary, Queen, Rosita Forbes's meetings with, 60, 92

Maud, Queen of Norway, 139

Mecca, pilgrimages to, 60, 62-4

Meinertzhagen, Armorer, 14-15, 16

Menelik the Conqueror, 114

Mesched, 232

Mexico, 367ff.  
 Indians, 370

Mexico City, 369

Middle East, the, 53ff, 201ff. *See also*  
 each country by name

Midi, 77-8

Milan, 39

Mohamed, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51

Monastir, 180-1, 193ff.

Monkhouse, Mr. A., 291, 297

Monseil, Lord, 133

Montevideo, 255

Morocco, 14, 93ff, 145  
 Riff wars, 93ff.

Morocco, Sultan of, 94

Moscow, 291, 295, 301

Mount-Temple, Lady Molly, 132-3, 153-4

Mulai Sadiq or Raisuni, 96-7, 98

Mussolini, Benito, 39, 198-9  
 colonization policy, 198-9  
 in 1920, 39  
 in 1929, 197-9  
 meetings with Rosita Forbes, 39, 197-9  
 personality, 197-9

National Socialism, 311, 337ff.  
 Herr Hitler on, 307-9

Nazck el Abed, 203, 204

Nejef, 214-15

Newman, Anna, 294

Newman, General, 67

Nicodemus, Abbot, 163-4

Nicolai, Bishop, 182

Norway, 138-9

Nouri Sha-alan, puamount Sheikh of the  
 Ruwalla, 27, 83

Ochrida, 181

O'Donnell, Spike, 327, 328, 333

Ormonde, Lord and Lady, 142, 240

Pager, Germaine, 133

Palestine, 20, 22, 25, 207ff  
 Arabian attitude towards, 209  
 Jews and, 22, 25, 207, 208ff  
 racial riots, 20-1  
 Russian Jewish colonies in, 209ff.

Paris, 13-14, 58, 66

Pastori, Signor, Fiat expedition, 17

Patagonia, 265ff

Patterson, Mr., 17

Pavlevitch, Croat leader, 193

Peace treaties, 90-1, 155, 156, 160, 161, 185

Percy, cook in British Guiana, 355ff

Perdicaris, Mr., 94

Perkins, Frances, 318

Persia, 109-10, 214ff., 240  
 earthquake in Western, 236  
 foreign policy, 220, 224  
 Russian refugees in, 233, 235  
 supply route to Russia through, 216, 229

Perth, Lord, 13

Peru, 282ff.

Peter I, King of Yugo-Slavia, 196

Peter II, King of Yugo-Slavia, 183

Petra, 85, 86, 87-9

Philby, Dora, 86, 87, 88, 89

Philby, St. John, 23, 83-4, 85, 86-7, 88, 89  
 attempted crossing of Rub al Khali, 109-110  
 personality, 86-7, 89

Picot, Georges, 55

Pilkanyen, 265

Plauen, Count, 188-9

Poland, 141

Pond, James, 102, 105, 109

Portal, Lord and Lady, 240

Portland, Duke of, 207, 108

Portugal, 244

Potosi, 272-3

Powell, Michael, in Albania, 191ff.

Quito, 283

Qum, 216-17

Raditch, Stepan, 182

Raisuli, el, 93ff.  
 biography of, 93, 95ff  
 capture and death, 101  
 entertains Rosita Forbes, 99ff  
 home, 98

Rashid Ali, 77

Rava, Gino, 154

Read, Stroud, 191-2

Regionalism, President Roosevelt on, 322-3

Religion, Rosita Forbes on, 64

Rennell, Lord. *See* Rodd, Francis

- Reza Khan Pahlevi, ex-Shah of Persia, 215, 220  
 on foreign policy, 220  
 Richberg, Donald, 325  
 Riffs, the, 93ff.  
 Rio de Janeiro, 246ff.  
 Rodd, Francis (Lord Rennell), 15-16, 40  
 Roehm, Ernst, Herr Hitler and, 338-9  
 Rohlf, Gerhaid, 15  
 Roosevelt, Mrs., 320  
 Roosevelt, President, 315, 320-3  
 on regionalism, 322-3  
 on Russia, 322  
 personality, 320ff.  
 Rosita Forbes on, 56, 320ff.  
 Rosen, Lucie, 106, 107  
 Ross, Sir Denison, 108  
 Rouf Bey, 202  
 Roumania, 161, 162ff.  
 Rub al Khali, 86, 109-10  
 Rumbold, Sir Horace, 310  
 Russell, Lady, 137  
 Russia, 235, 291ff., 311-12  
 British engineers' trial in 1933, 291, 296-298  
 conditions in 1933, 292ff., 303  
 court trials, 295-6  
 federation in, 186  
 Finland and, 302  
 housing shortage and queues in 1933, 300-1  
 Ogpu, 298  
 President Roosevelt on, 322  
 refugees in other countries, 209, 233, 235  
 Rosita Forbes on, 100, 299-300  
 Soviet system's three achievements, 299-300  
 Ruwalla, the, 27ff.  
 Sabya, 76  
 Sackville-West, V., 241  
 Salonika, 180  
 Saoud, Ibn, King of Saudi Arabia, 23, 26, 29, 86  
 Saya Bey el Atrash, 207  
 Sayed Mohamed Idris, Prince of the Senussi, 37  
 letter from King Feisal, 39, 40, 42  
 Rosita Forbes and, 41-2  
 Sayed Riddha, 41, 42  
 Schulenburg, Count, 234  
 Scott, General, 110  
 Selassi, Woldo, 'nagadi', 117, 118  
 Senussi, 15, 37  
 Serbia, 180  
 kings of, 195  
 Serbs, the, 182-3  
 Shiraz, 222, 224  
 Shurgaz, the, 229  
 Sierra, the, 275ff.  
 Sik, the (Petra), hold-up at, 87-8  
 Simpson, Squadron Leader, *One of our Pilots is Safe*, 72  
 Sofia, 174-5  
 Sophie, Queen of Greece, 168  
 South America, 244ff., 335-7, 341-2  
 forests, 260-1  
 Germany and, 336  
 populations, 245  
 presidents, 283  
 revolutions, 245  
 Spain, political position in 1931, 243-4  
 Sparks, Peter, 152  
 Stamboul, 176, 177  
 Stancioff, Nadejda, 171  
 Stancioffs, the, 171  
 Stirling, Colonel W., 42, 186, 191  
 Stirling, Marygold, 186  
 Stirr, Countess Limburg, 139  
 Storrs, Sir Ronald, 64  
 Sturdy, Edward and Karen, 133-4  
 Sucre, 274-5  
 Sykes, Sir Percy, 107-8  
*History of Exploration*, 69  
 Syria, 19, 23ff., 31ff., 203-4  
 King Feisal on, 25, 26  
 political situation, 31ff.  
 Tachsin Kadri, 26  
 Tafari, Ras. *See* Haile Selassie  
 Taj, 49, 50  
 Tehran, 219-20, 234  
 Tello, Ibrahim Agha Hiske, 236-7  
 Teymouratche, 219  
 Thomas, Bertram, 85, 86, 87ff., 110  
 Thwaites, Sir William, 61  
 Tierra, President G., 255, 283  
 Tirana, 186-8  
 Titulesco, M., 171, 183  
 Torr, Herbert (father of Rosita Forbes), 10, 18, 20, 54, 59  
 Torr, Tony, 58-9, 315  
 death, 59  
 wife, 59  
 Torr, Wyndham, 95  
 Trans-Jordan, 83ff.  
 Transylvania, 160, 161-2  
 Tredegar, Lord, 150  
 Trefusis, Violet, 137-8  
 Trlpolitania, 15, 198  
 Trujillo, 276, 281  
 Tuffnell, Bill, 242  
 Turkey, 176ff., 201ff.  
 Kurds fighting against, 236-7  
 Twiss, Colonel, 60, 61  
 United States, 102ff., 315ff., 333-4  
 in 1933, 315ff.  
 night of repeal of prohibition, 325ff.  
 outlook contrasted with British, 106  
 Rosita Forbes on, 103, 104, 105, 108  
 social parties in, 315ff.  
 Uruguay, 254ff., 289-90, 337, 342  
 Vagliano, 15  
 Van Haecken Van Kells, the, 140

Vanneck, Andrew, 134  
 Vargas, Getulio, 283  
 Venezelos, M., 159  
 Venezuela, 359ff.  
     oil of, 362  
 Venice, 153-4  
  
 Walpole, Maude, 59  
 Ward, Mr., crosses the Shurgaz depression,  
     229  
 Washington, parties in, 315ff.  
 Weizmann, Dr., 19  
 Welling, Lieutenant Charles, 328ff.  
 West, Rebecca, 106, 107  
 West, V. Sackville-, 241  
 Westminster, Constance, Duchess of  
     ('Sheila'), 142, 239  
 Wigan, General and Mrs., 133  
 Wilhelmina, Queen, 140  
 Windsor, Duke of, broadcast in England  
     before leaving, 71  
 Wise, E. P., 189  
 Women  
     Cholo women, 271-2  
     English conception, 36  
     in Ecuador, 287-8

Women—*continued*  
     in United States, 104  
     in Yemen, 78  
  
 Xauen, 97  
 Xauen, Qadi of, 97-8  
  
 Yehya, Imam of Yemen, 76  
 Yemen, 79ff., 82  
     kat used in, 79-80  
     women of, 78  
 Yezd, 226-7  
 Yucatan, 366  
 Yugo-Slavia, 180ff.  
     races, 193-4  
     unity, King Alexander on, 194  
 Yugo-Slavia, Prince Paul of, 196  
  
 Zaiditu, Empress of Abyssinia, 111-14  
     Rosita Forbes and Harold Jones received  
     by, 111-12  
 Zichy, Baron Rubido, 141, 142, 159  
 Zog, King of Albania, 185, 186-7, 197  
     entertains Rosita Forbes, 186-7  
 Zoroastrianism, 227

